· More than a Prophet ·

Charles Clifton Penick, D.D.

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"MORE THAN A PROPHET"

BY

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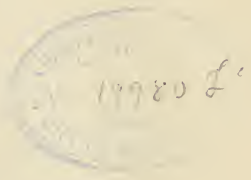

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THOMAS WHITTAKER

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PREFACE.

IT has pleased God to call me from the companions and loved ones of my early ministry, to preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in Africa; hence this little book of thoughts on the life of John the Baptist for them. I selected John's life because I love him with a strong, tender, vast personal love. Jesus excepted, there has no one gone from earth to heaven whose spirit I hope to press close to my own with a thrill more enrapturing and a joy more deep, than this mighty man of God, who stood all alone, so strong, firm, and true.

I have culled these few thoughts from among many of my soul communings, because I deemed them helpful to my children in the Gospel, and comforting to the few tried true ones who have stood nearest and firmest by me in life's battles. To these I dedicate this

little volume, with deep, sweet gratitude for the memories of the past, and strong, brightening hopes for the love, glory, and rest of that future when we shall meet and have each other forever.

C. CLIFTON PENICK.

BALTIMORE, MD., Oct, 29, 1880.

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"More Than a Prophet."

CHAPTER I.

GOD LOVES GOOD FRUITS FOR HIS GREAT ACRES.

"There was in the days of Herod, the King of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth."—Luke 1 : 5–22.

GOD is very careful in selecting and training the parents of His heroes. Long time may their souls travail ere there is a token of a real birth. God can wait, or, rather, make man wait until his requirements ripen. Abraham and Sarah were not ready to receive Isaac, the promised son, until after a life of long and severe travail. Long did Manoah and his seeming barren wife wait, struggle, suffer, and pray ere a Samson was born. Deep, bitter,

and long were the agonies of a Hannah ere a Samuel was brought forth to stand for his God before Israel and a world. It was in his old age that Jesse begat David, the glory of Israel's kings and the man after God's own heart. And now we come to the close of the Jewish dispensation. God is about to widen His promises unto all the world. The Mosaic law is to be fulfilled : yes, so full by the great soul of Jesus that it shall run over, and the glad tidings flow on, on, widening, deepening through the desert, making it "blossom as the rose," teaching the mountains to send forth "rivers of waters" until the "knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

Now mark how like the beginning is the close of this preparatory kingdom ; how like the birth of Isaac is the birth of John the Baptist ! Zacharias and Elizabeth were both old now. Long and faithfully had God trained their souls for the parentship a man so grand ; and now, in the evening twilight of life, as they wait the call to "come up higher," lo ! the Angel Gabriel appears in the temple

and announces the promise of God, the birth of John the Baptist, the last prophet of the Old Dispensation, who was to be born, reared, and trained by those whom God had trained and proven so many trusting, serving years, thus making the hearts of Zacharias and Elizabeth beat in deep sympathy with those of Abraham and Sarah, causing them to feel that He who began could and would fulfill all His glorious work.

It is time men and women were awakening to the realization of the responsibility before God of bringing souls into existence, were looking into the great causes which go to make the blessing of God a part of a child's birth. Surely, few of the pages of time record more thoughtless recklessness than the birth-page of man. With what abandonment do millions beget and launch young souls upon the awful sea of eternal existence, on to the issues of life or death, without first having prepared their hearts and lives for this fearful responsibility before God, who has ordered a law to run under all these deeds and carry their consequences on through coming generations. "The

promise is to you and your seed" is a glorious hope; "visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" is a fearful reality. How, in the face of these solemn declarations of God, a Christian man or woman can marry a sinner, running all the risk of damning their offspring, to say nothing of committing the deepest and most sacred chambers of the heart to the partnership of one under the control and in the service of Satan, is what I cannot comprehend. It certainly shows a sad mistrust of God's own words and laws, and a horrible braving of consequences before which angels would tremble.

But the Angel Gabriel came to a man and woman approved of God, and came with joy. How His spirit dwells in those great truths wrapped up in His message! Think you he bore that message with cold indifference? Think you his was the only angelic spirit thrilled with its truths? I trow not.

It is no mere accident that such revelations come to us, when an angel announces the birth of Isaac, Samson, John the Baptist, and

our Lord ; for they show how intensely the heavenly hosts bend in living interest over these birth-scenes, and with what joy, when God permits them to foresee a great spirit's birth. No wonder, then, that the choirs of heaven came singing at the birth of Jesus. No wonder, when in Revelation we see the woman delivered of a man-child who was to rule the nations, that the child should be caught up unto God and to His throne from a persecuting earth. It is a sweet, comforting thought to realize how close in sympathy these spirits of God hover over the birth-bed of the Christian child, a true propagation of Christian nature by Christian parents. And it is no wonder we hear of their joy in the presence of God, when "one sinner repenteth," one child they have watched and ministered to from birth comes out and fully clasps the sweet fellowship of our Lord. Christian parents, take courage ; God's angels are helping you !

Gabriel pours out the rich treasures of his heavenly message, and pauses before the soul of Zacharias as it staggers beneath the overwhelming richness of the promise, and stum-

bles at the frailty of himself. "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years." Alas, how often are we stunned at the greatness of God's goodness! Would that we could look less at our own frailty and more at His boundless grace. How many Christians, like Zacharias, can faithfully and blamelessly serve God through a long life of toil, and yet cannot open their hearts to the fulness of His gracious love. Some great blessing promised seems to stun them, and, like Jacob, they must see the wagons Joseph sent ere they can rejoice; or, like Zacharias, must be dumb for a season, until in their stillness they know He is God.

Strong and startling comes back the answer to his doubt: "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God." To have his veracity questioned with a doubt was what the heavenly messenger could not brook. He stood "in the presence of God," where truth eternal, truth as live and splendid as the face of Jehovah, beamed in its glory, and no doubt showed it there. "I am Gabriel, a heavenly

character, one whose word is known ; here is my name, here is my address ; you doubt my words : look to it, then, for where I stand nothing that is not truth can live ; thou shalt be dumb and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words which shall be fulfilled in their season."

Doubt and unbelief have often silenced the tongue and hushed the joy that should have sounded forth God's praises in songs of gladness. Zacharias now believes ; but it is such a belief as speaks not the joy of soul, such a silent trust as should deepen every word of that heavenly messenger into his very being of beings, and grave it on his heart of hearts. And we learn that when God speaks, commanding us to do or promising us a blessing, He will make our strength sufficient for all His requirements. "My grace is sufficient for thee ; my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Thus it was that God broke the long, painful silence of the night of anxious watching, so quietly, so strongly, so sweetly amid the ris-

ing fragrance of two holy, loving, faithful lives. The great temple of Herod stood in the dazzling show of its magnificence ; but the centre of interest now turns from it to the holier temple of the consecrated lives, by the fireside of Zacharias and the carpenter-ship of Nazareth.

CHAPTER II.

THE GLORY OF MOTHERHOOD.

LUKE 1 : 23–56.

WE have here one of the most tender, touching, beautiful pictures in all the realms of human life : two women chosen of God—one to be the mother of the "greatest of woman born," and the other the mother of the Son of God Himself—and it pleases God to lift the inner veil, to let all of His children look upon their heart-life from the time of conception to the day of bringing forth. Mothers, here is a page of God's word for you ; here the hand of inspiration holds before your souls the great mirror of true motherhood at the period which of all others must be to you the most intense, anxious, and hopeful of life, if you are true women—those days when you are conscious of an immortal soul about to be ushered into existence through your life, and

you feel within you the throbbings of life as they struggle in your first-born—life of your life issuing from you to speed on to eternity and to God. This is a time for deep heart searchings, strong soul pleadings, great heart longings and hopings, tremblings, and prayers. It is said of Elizabeth, "she hid herself five months," and as she passed out from the world's noisy, busy toil and confusion, the words which echo her farewell are full and sweet. "Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein He looked on me to take away my reproach among men." With these words falling upon our ears as she departs, it is not hard to know where and for what she has gone into the cleft of the rock to hide her with her God, to nourish that precious life-germ within her on the milk from heaven, and breathe holy inspiration into the very essence of his conception, that he may come forth from the womb with the pulsations of God's spirit bounding in his first heart-beats, and the nature of his God breathed in his first breath. No wonder, then, that we hear the great truth, "He was filled with the Holy Ghost

even from his mother's womb." Oh, mothers, do you see what a gate to His heart and life God opens here especially for you? Do you see how you may get Him to make your child, as it were, born again from the womb, and let the first pulsation of that young life be thrilled with the glad leapings of glorious immortality? Who can doubt that a child so conceived, so born in the very atmosphere of holiness, as it were on the very steps of the Mercy Seat, must be blessed of God?

But let us come a little closer, and hear the echoes of her heart a little deeper. The Virgin Mary has come to keep vigil with her, and ask her soul-watchings in her own holy hopes, and the two stand facing each other: the young "blessed above women" and the old faithful servant whose God has "taken away her reproach before men." The Gospel faces the Law. The Law is God's mercy brought forth by His mighty power from man's sinful barrenness. Sarah was barren, Rebekah was barren, Hannah was barren, Elizabeth was barren, but God's mercy found a way to propagate a chosen seed and lead on the genera-

tion of His elect through all these difficulties. But now, when it comes to Christ, full nature leaps gladly to her duty all in tune, and the young, hopeful, pure virgin combines in the fulness and freshness of her womanhood with God's great nature of love; from henceforth flows on in its boundless and fathomless depths of grace. The nature of God no longer speaks through the narrow channels of a ceremonial law, but beats, rises, swells, and sweeps under us, about us, through us, over us, in the soul-filling life of Christ. In Him is life, and He came that we might have this life more abundantly; that the life of God should henceforth flow in the wideness and fulness of the Spirit, and not in the narrow barrenness of the letter.

At the sound of the Virgin's voice the babe leaped in the womb of Elizabeth; and this was no mere convulsive, spasmodic jerk, but we are expressly told "it was a leap for joy." God's nature had already so permeated mother and child that the deep quickenings of His Spirit outran the course of nature, and sent a thrill of joy into a being yet unborn.

Thus began that joy which shone in the fullness of glory when, long years after, St. John said, "The friend of the Bridegroom standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled." The joy-leap of the babe was the signal for Elizabeth to break forth in grateful praise—short, but full of faith—which was answered in that exalted and exquisite soul-anthem from the Virgin, bursting forth in the rapturous words, "My soul doth magnify the Lord. My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." Such scenes as this are not oft vouchsafed to mortal eyes; and echoes so sweet and deep from hearts so pure and true, not oft heard by human ears amid the echoes of this cruder life and the grating of a world's friction. Let our souls then, dwell with tender, deep, earnest joy amid their never-dying echoes, and may we press on with all the power of a living, yearning determination to like exaltation and entire consecration of soul.

Sweet indeed must have been the soul-communings of Mary and Elizabeth during this

visit. It is not hard to make companionship rich with living joy when we have the great aims and ends of life all in common. The deepest, sweetest soul-blendings this earth can ever know are those born when two great, pure hearts, true to God, flow into each other in some great life-absorbing, confidential, heaven-sent purpose. Such meetings linger in memory like the scenes of bursting sunlight here and there over the clouded landscape, as if Heaven's smiling sympathy broke through to sweeten and bless. Alas! would that there were more such in life; would that there were an exaltation in human love, and that souls would climb higher, get nearer to God to make love, or I should say to find it; for when God tunes two hearts, they have only to touch and the concord of sweet harmony rolls forth. Yes. if we ascended in our love-seeking we would get beyond the blight of disappointments and the witherings of years, for we would love God in each other; the sure beauties of eternal realities that time nor space can change, nor worldly fortune nor frown becloud; a locking and clasping of souls, to pass on unbroken into

the sweet companionship of heaven's own eternal joys.

"About three months Mary abode with Elizabeth, and then departed to her own home." The duties in this life are too real, the battle too pressing, the issues too tremendous to permit "loyal hearts and true" to sit enjoying each other long. Here we may but clasp hands and press on to the front, may but let the heart leap in the holy light of greeting love, to go forward stronger, gladder, braver, into the battle. Jesus loves us too tenderly and dearly to permit us to keep any other than Himself always by our sides. He, and He alone, can say, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," and He alone is fit for this continuous companionship. We cannot grow greater and stronger, truer and braver, brighter and happier, in any other companionship than His. "My grace is sufficient for thee." So, leaning on His arm alone, we go into the battle. Still on we press, through the long anxious days, nights, and years of watching, with Him alone, and when at last we descend into "the dark valley of the shadow of death," we

still "fear no evil; *His* rod and His staff comfort us," and the "Everlasting Arms" are still around us.

Thus may we, like Mary and Elizabeth, drink in all the joys of holy companionship as God sends them, and then press on, each in her course, to a more complete companionship with God, and the brave and faithful bringing forth and fulfilling His holy purposes intrusted to us.

CHAPTER III.

THE PREACHER SUPERSEDES THE PRIEST.

"His name is John."—LUKE 1 : 59–79.

THE day of Elizabeth's delivery came : her child was born. It must have been a touching scene when the aged father gazed in *silent* adoration at the fulfilment of God's promise. But it was best thus. The soul needs silence : needs to be still that it may know He is God ; needs seasons of long, deep communion, holy heart-talk with God, unbroken by a prattling world's interruptions.

The day of circumcision has come : the child must be named, and the rejoicing friends would honor the father by giving his boy the name of Zacharias. The mother objects, and says, "His name *is* John." Friends protest ; "None of his kindred is named John" : they refer it to Zacharias. He calls for his tablet, and writes, "His name *is John*," *i.e.*, gracious gift of Jehovah. Yes, the day of grace had

come. The long reign of the schoolmaster "Law" draws to its close, and with it the long and much cherished line of the priesthood. Henceforth the ministers of the Gospel, the "messengers of glad tidings," must go before him and "turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." Henceforth the *prophets*, and not the *priests*, are to be His apostles to fallen man, sent to tell of the great sacrifice offered, the debt paid, the sinner ransomed, the Father reconciled, the great "it is finished," and not to pretend to offer anew the sacrifice for sin. Yes, John comes to usher in the King of Grace, the reign of God's love; and it was meet and fit that with his very name he should cut asunder those associations that bound him to the old order of things, for he comes to proclaim the kingdom of heaven at hand, the shadows past and the substance present. He came to honor God's grace, not to prolong Zacharias' name, family line, or priesthood. The preacher John takes the place of the priest Zacharias, and the wilderness and the conquest of the world are substituted for Jerusalem and the Temple.

So God seems to have ordered; but alas, how long do men hover over that which lives only in the past and was buried on Mount Calvary! How do they long for the days and incense of Zacharias, instead of pressing into the kingdom at the preaching of John! No wonder that all present marvelled at those words written by Zacharias. No wonder they laid up those words in their hearts, saying, "What manner of child shall this be?" For in that name and its surroundings they felt a trembling like that of an earthquake strike through all the structures of the Levitical dispensation.

No sooner had the words been traced by the style of Zacharias than his tongue was loosed, and the deep, rich meditations of his heart burst forth: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David."

How thoroughly had God's chastening done its work. Oh, it is a blessed and glorious thing to see a good man under the rod of the

Lord! It is like Moses smiting the rock, and forthwith streams of pure living water come forth to slake the thirsting souls of thousands.

The sweetest, purest, freshest springs we find in God's word are those given when He bows some holy soul in sorrow; and well may the pilgrim exclaim, "Ofttimes joy is wrung from sadness." Had not Abel bled and died, He never would have spoken and encouraged all the armies of these sorrow-tried souls. Had not Noah toiled, waited, and stood through all those long days of trial without seeing one soul converted, or even convinced, outside of his own family, we would all miss one great, resting, comforting example in the past. If Abraham's heart had not bled at the severing of the father-ties that bound him to his loved Ishmael, and pressed on through all the fearful trials of Mount Moriah, the faithful would have missed a father. And so with Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David—yea, every hero of God comes closer to us in the moments of his deepest agonies, his hours of heroic faithfulness amid the sorrows and trials God sent. Truly, truly, sorrow is one of

our richest blessings. Trouble sweeps the sweetest chords from our heart-strings, and blends our spirits lovingly into each other. Yes, God is preparing a family of saints to love Him and one another with a love which the whole creation groaned and travaileth to see manifested ; and this deep love is begotten in sorrow's vale. Here, amid these dark, sweet, sad soul-trials, He is weaving heart to heart, spirit to spirit, in ties that no angel bosom can feel, and fitting them to "sing a new song" never heard in heaven before—the song of sympathetic love which Jesus shares with us through His sorrows ; for the "Captain of our salvation is made perfect through suffering." It was once my privilege to attend a saint of the Lord who for forty years had been an intense sufferer from acute rheumatism. One morning, just before his death, I asked him, "Well, Mr. Merritt, what have you been meditating about to-day?" "The angels," he said. "What about the angels?" I asked. "I have been thinking why we should have a better inheritance than they." "Why do you think we will?" "Because our trials

and conflicts are greater than theirs," he said.

Again, these sorrows and trials fit us for the duties of life, and show us God's way. When Zacharias recovered speech, God's kingdom, Christ's nearness, was the theme of his first praise; not his own son, or the hopes of his own line of priesthood, but "hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David." Ah, how brightly the stars come out after the storm-clouds roll away, and with what loveliness they look down on us through the purified atmosphere! So with our souls. When our sorrow is truly godly sorrow, and the clouds pass, heaven, with all its stars of hope, seems so much nearer. God's ways reach before us, and God's plans unfold for us with a personal sweetness, a wideness of joy before unfelt, and we cry with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." It is worth while to go, Jacob-like, halting on a shrunken thigh through the rest of life's pilgrimage to be a real Prince of God.

And sorrow gives us a real and true view of our surroundings, our blessings, our trusts, and

our ties of relationship. Now could Zacharias see truly the mission of John. There is not one word of parental selfishness, not one breathing for earth's claim upon him. He does not even say "*my* child," but yields him up to the great work of God with a deep, glad willingness, a joy like that of Hannah when she dedicated Samuel to her God. To these parents the ordinance of circumcision was more than a formal ceremony, it was a living reality, and God's obligatory requirement of the parent, an obligating of entire and honest yielding and training of the child for God. Zacharias says of John, "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." Blessed and lofty parental realization! holy and grand calling for his boy! Would God that Christians did more fully enter into this glory, and flee to this safety for their children to-day! But how few yield them up to the service of God. Where are the Abrams, Hannahs, and Zacharias of this age? Alas, alas! When we would speak of lofty, heroic consecration, a life of service and a death of glory for the children of the wealthy and great now, they would say,

as Simon Peter of old, "Far be it from thee," my child; as if God dishonored their children or robbed them of happiness by the hardships of His service, not knowing that thus they are winning immortal laurels and crowns of unfading glory, and are only "suffering with Him that they may also reign with Him."

Had we more silent, true communings with God; meditated we more deeply and faithfully and truthfully upon the realities, eternal as well as temporal, of life; did we but pass oftener and lower "under the rod" of our God, with hearts more deeply bowed to His will, we would see and grasp these heavenly glories for our children; would lose sight of what a child was to be to us in the glory of what he would be to his God, and baptism would become an act in which the child would be as wholly and faithfully offered up to God as was Isaac on the Mount of God: so parent and child would be blessed in an eternal relationship of glory.

CHAPTER IV.

GROWING.

"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel."—LUKE 1 : 80.

IN order to lift religion there must be a higher soul-centre to attract. One must take a stand nearer to God, and call others up to him. When the philosopher Archimedes said, "Give me a point without the world, and I will lift the world," he uttered a truth far deeper than his material philosophy could ever reach—a truth on which rests the restoration of the fallen souls of men. God is educating John the Baptist to be the greatest reformer of the Mosaic dispensation; and in order to fit him for the work He sends him, not to any school or society of men, but to the deep solitudes of the desert. There is a time, a state of society and religion when true education can only be had by seclusion therefrom—a time when the

whole moral and religious atmosphere becomes so impregnated with clouds and mists of wrong, and so enslaved to the fear and opinions of men, that we must go into solitude and there ask our hearts, "What sayeth the Lord?" We must flee from the ever-shifting sands on time's sea-shore, flee from the ceaseless rush and confusion of its breaking billows, into some quiet desert mountain, and there listen to the surgings of eternity within us. Here, and here alone, will we catch the sound of immortal truth; here will we get a view of the everlasting hills; here will we feel the strong presence of the living God pressing in brawny reality close up to life's daily duties. And here, then, it was that God sent the "greatest of woman born," to form and harden that life until in its lone greatness it should bow the hearts of a nation as the tempest bows the trees of the forest. Let us go into the deserts with the soul of this great man, and see him in God's great school. "He grew." Though he was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb," as the Angel Gabriel expressly foretold, yet he grew. What

would fill his mind, heart, and powers as an infant would not fill them as a boy of ten, and what would fill them at ten years of age would sadly fail at sixteen. So he must needs keep growing without and within. The child lived with God, and his yearning heart stretched itself out to God, and opened its depths for God. His book was the book of Eternal Truth, and his soul sought to lay hold thereof, and to bring forth its naked realities. He studied God and man through God. He proved God a living, surrounding, unfailing reality. He saw the mighty purposes of Jehovah marching with firm, relentless tread straight on to fulfil the Omnipotent will, despite all the obscurities and delusions of men. He felt that the heart of religion centred not in Gamaliel or Hillel, the Pharisee's Council or the Lawyer's school, but that it beat with the warm throbs of Omnipotent purpose and love in the bosom of God.

The vision of this truth made him intensely real. He did not go into the wilderness to study poetry or indulge sentiment; he went there to grapple with the sinfulness of his na-

ture ; went to join the great battle against the enemies of his soul. Much has been written and said by great and good men of the help John received, and the joys he inhaled from the beauties and glories of nature, as unfolded in the material surroundings. I would say, the holy page does not so present him. There are no traces of the poet left in his composition when he comes forth ; but he is covered with the scars of many a battle. His tread is that of the stern, conquering hero of many sad and sore hand-to-hand conflicts. His voice is that of the great commander still leading up his legions against an enemy whose strength he has felt, and whose terrible presence he realizes with vivid certainty, but realizes in a full, firm confidence of his power to overcome.

It is a dangerous thing to go into the great solitudes of life to bury ourselves in sentiment, and come forth poets or artists seeking a world's approval rather than its salvation ; come forth to live on the mere sentiments or dreams of a heart, never to be put into real life. The true poetry of life is not in word, but in action ; not in a dream, but in a living conquest ; and if

we cannot act; if fear, indifference, or weakness have chained us and led us away captives, it is better we should "hang our harps on the willows, and sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon." Never, never should we content ourselves by the echoes of grand sentiments rolling through inactive lives. John did not so learn God. He grew in purpose, and when he came forth on the banks of Jordan and stood before assembled Israel, it was not with pretty sentiments, but vivid consciousness of awful reality, with the thunderings of "the wrath to come" resounding in his ears. Surely, surely life is too real and its issues too imminent and awful to permit of anything but intense, earnest action, as direct and strong as God's grace will lead us. If there is poetry, let it be the poetry of the soul-seeker, the song of deliverance, or of Moses and the Lamb, and not an echo from the mere Kosmos (the material world of the Greeks).

Again, John "waxed strong in spirit." This was another result of his schooling in the desert. He was gathering strength silently in the great conquest of self. His soul was wax-

ing mighty in purpose. He was gathering up life's great forces, and bathing them over and over in the purposes of God until they were becoming brawny with the essence of Omnipotence. He was not scattering or squandering the powers of his soul, as we see so many thousands doing to-day. Here is one of the greatest dangers and disasters of our time. Men and women squander their soul powers. They become partners in a thousand enterprises, and pleasures, and plans, until they become weak along the whole line of their characters. They never learn what Jesus meant when He told Martha she was "troubled about many things: one thing is needful." Yes, we are losing the power of soul concentration in holy things, and falling away by trying to be many masters. Even in the offices of the sacred ministry, sermons, falsely so called, have claimed and gotten so much time and thought that it is a rare thing to find a man now who, like the Apostles of old, is willing to go up to this battle in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit, carrying everything by the intensity of that Gospel which

"is the power of God unto salvation." "They who take the sword will perish by the sword," for they rely thereon more than on the presence of the Jesus who stands apparently bound and powerless in the hands of men; but remember, it was just at this very moment He said, "Put up thy sword," and "I could pray the Father, and He could presently give me more than twelve legions of angels." "The Jews will require a sign, and the Greeks seek after knowledge," but only Jesus can be "the power of God unto salvation," even though a "stumbling-block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek." St. John knew this in his honest dealings with his own soul; he learned to look up to the hills from whence came his strength, and lead men to the Rock that was higher than he, and there leave them. Gathering up all his soul-powers, concentrating them on God and His will, the man "waxed strong in spirit," and his purpose became like a river—vast, irresistible, sweeping on in its course with a mighty conquest, to rest in the boundless sea of his God's own eternal depths of glory.

Every life has its desert period—those grand, solemn days when God calls us out of the world's noises to commune in deep consultation with Him until the soul's purposes are shaped, and the characters of our immortal spirits formed. These are the days of destiny, these the birth-hours of all that is really great for us; times when we are truly born again if we will be, or when we rush back and plunge into the troubled sea of unregenerate existence, never to find rest. If we look back down the long line of God's heroic ones, we will find each had his wilderness. Abel must have lived, as it were, in the desert with God until His life was true enough to be poured out as a drink-offering, not only for God but for you and me: yes, that true blood speaks to us in grand soul-girding tones to-day. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, dwelt all their lives in the grand deserts of existence, and tabernacled with God. Moses, David, Daniel, Elijah, Jeremiah—yea, all God's great ones were caused to turn their backs on a world and face the truths of the living God, until those truths rose up in them to march in

triumph, through the opposition of men and devils, to glorious victory.

Now, as then, God calls us to the wilderness school—calls us out to uncover the great purposes of truth before us, and sends us back to stand up for Him, regardless of all the surgings of sin, applause, fear, or death. Here, and here alone, is the safety of any church, age, or man, in "the kingdom of God within;" trueness to the great ideal of life realized, as the soul in its lone consecration stretches itself on the naked will of God, and feels the strong beatings of His eternal purposes of Truth, Justice, and Love.

CHAPTER V.

GOD'S MESSENGER.

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John."—JOHN 1 : 6.

HE was a man, brawny, true, and grand. John did no miracle, wore no priestly robe, moved not with the multitude's favor like "a reed shaken by the wind," sought no political preferments, was backed by no patronage from sect or school, favored by no party in power. John had no towering temple above him, no company of sweet singers around him, no time-honored ritual guiding him. He was severed from friend and family; independent, for "his meat was locusts and wild honey," and his robe camel's hair. Girded for action, with the staff of his pilgrimage, he stands before the world in the might of his God. Without order of logical precision or ornament of rhetoric, his trumpet voice waked the valleys of Jordan,

echoed along the wild, craggy mountains of Judea, startling a nation deep in darkness, deadness, and sin, into dread solicitude; until the beggar from the street and the king from his throne tremble before the thunder of his powerful words, which bend the multitudes as the breeze bends the fields of ripening wheat.

Where lay his power? Where was hidden the suasive strength of this mightier than Samson? He was wanting in everything that his contemporaries trusted for power, and he would be pronounced by men of this day sadly deficient in the "*sine qua nons*" of ecclesiastical armor, *i.e.*, some church's approval; but despite all this he was mightier than they all, and compelled their hearts to bow to the greatness of his mission. The answer comes back, "He was a man sent from God." He knew this, he felt it, he trusted it, and in this trust stood strong and sure high up on the great Rock of Ages, unmoved by all the sad, restless surgings of the multitudes below; for his soul rested above all the torrents that swept and swayed among their lower aims and

passions, above the tremblings and crashings of their worldly doubts and fears. Yes, "he was a man sent from God," and God had charged his soul with power as real as that which moves in the bosom of the black midsummer's cloud and speaks in the thunder's voice. He can make a man wake the nation's souls from their slumbers as easily as He can make the sun call forth the spring with its life.

Come, now, and let us look into this mighty man's soul. God had sent a message from heaven saying, "He shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias." This is the outline of his character: let us trace it as deep as God's sight permits.

"The spirit of Elias": that great heroic spirit that could come wild-clad all alone from the mountains of Gilead, and pass with dauntless eye and firm tread through all the guards of an Ahab's palace, until he stood facing the idolatrous monarch, and then with stern, unquivering voice thunder God's judgments into his ears; a spirit that could brook sin no more on the throne and in the court than on

the street or in the hovel; that spirit that stands "before the living God" and looks at sin in all the awful realities as it glares by the revelations of that holy light; that spirit that loses all aims of earth in the great burning zeal for the glory of God; that spirit which cares more for men's souls than for men's praise, more for their salvation than their temporal pleasure; a spirit that feels the living touch of the living God in each duty of life, and hears the great surgings of eternal consequences; a spirit that can dare a king or court a desert with equal joy or fearlessness; a spirit that can stand as joyfully and great amid the solitudes of the desert, receiving its daily food from the unclean raven's beak, and feel as content and glorious as when it stands on Mount Carmel and sees heaven's fire descending from the living God in answer to its prayer, and hears the great shout of a trembling nation owning its God to be Jehovah; a spirit that can go to the brook Chereth at the command of its God, and there sit through the long years of trial with obedient joy—sit while the curse of God deepens on the land of

wickedness, and the parching breath of dearth withers field and forest, dries fountain and river, sit watching the little streamlet's waters fail day by day, as if God's curse were pursuing him too, still sit without one doubt or misgiving, drinking and living more from the promise of his God than the brook before him, but grandly standing at his lonely, God-appointed post until that God shall relieve him. Yes, this is the spirit in which John the Baptist stands to run his mighty course before the face of the Son of God. And he came, too,

"In the *power* of Elias." Elias burst before a world in the sublime company of the living God, unattended by any earthly court or auxiliaries. He had the arm of God as his legions. His power was the glorious might of eternal truth, born in his soul during those great battles of loneliness in the deserts, wherein he had taken hold of the strength of the living God. Oh, why is it that men do so discard this strength, and turn to the help of man which is so vain—man, whose "breath is in his nostrils," and who will perish as the grass? Truly, power belongeth unto God, and

these mighty men realized this, and with all their souls laid hold of it. They both gathered power from the same grand source, and were both marshalled in the same glorious presence, that of the living God. The power of right and truth was in their hearts, and we now trace the likeness in the effects of this power.

Both startled and awed a nation. At Elijah's command Israel assembled on Mount Carmel. John the Baptist called, and Israel assembled on the banks of the Jordan. At the sign of God called forth by Elijah's prayer, Israel cried out, "The Lord He is God! the Lord He is God!" At the command of John the nation was "baptized, confessing their sins." If an Ahab trembled before Elijah, a Herod trembled before John. If the priests of Baal fell before Elijah, the scribes and Pharisees fell before John. Elijah wielded his power in the execution of miracles, and "John did no miracle;" but John was just as strong and real in the consciousness of God's help and presence, and his power was none the less glorious and live because it was not clothed in a miraculous garb. The grandest use of

power is to manifest God, and this is done far oftener without than with miracles. The results of John's display of God's power are just as real, lasting, and glorious as those of Elijah. Elijah stands before us, burning amid the severities of Law like the flames on Sinai amid the darkness of midnight. John the Baptist shows us those fierce beacon flames paling amid the exceeding glory of the morn, as the "Sun of Righteousness," rising, spreads His healing wings over the earth. The power of each was true unto death. Neither of these great champions of God ever lowered his arm in the arena. Elijah swept on brighter, more victorious, until he mounted the chariot of fire and ascended to his God; while John moved straight on, unshaken amid all the dark clouds of adversity, unmoved amid all the thunders of wrath or the burnings of hate, leaning on the arm of his God, in the mighty grandeur of his lone trueness, passes up through the martyr-gate into the rank of the mightiest of woman born.

"When loyal hearts and true
Stand ever in the light,
All rapture through and through,
In God's most holy sight."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WILDERNESS TEMPLE.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea."—MATT. 3 : 1.

THE days when Tiberius polluted the throne of the Roman Empire; the days when Pontius Pilate was grinding the hearts of the nation to madness by his cruelties, extortions, and arrogancy; the days when a Herod Antipas lived in open adultery with his brother's wife, and led off into all that could degrade, corrupt, and destroy social greatness and domestic purity; the days when Caiaphas and Annas divided the functions of the high priest, and disgraced the office they usurped; the days when the balance of power rested in the hands of unprincipled Herodians, or, worse still, that awful horde of tyrants, the Sadducees, made cruel and hard by the obliteration of any belief in the life hereafter. No be-

lief or unbelief under heaven can more effectually curse and demonize the use of power than that which hides from the soul all dread of a judgment to come. Woe, woe to that nation and people when their rulers in high places wax bold in this blindness, for they are sure to send public oppression, private debauchery, and desecration through the land. At such times as these, natural instincts of purer natures draw strongly toward lives of lonely seclusion ; they, like David, crave the "wings of a dove wherewith to fly away and be at rest." But lo ! it is just into such a vortex we see John the Baptist stepping, a lone champion in this terrible arena.

He comes ! Long had he buried his soul in the desert loneliness, and bathed it in the purposes and powers of his God until it is strong enough to rise in this lone night and breast all the powers that sweep in such wild devastation over the world, and he feels the spirit of God leading him up into the battle. True religion cannot hide from the conflict any more than the strong wing of the eagle can remain quietly folded in its lonely nest. Courage,

heroic and conquestive, is as really a part, and as vital a part, of true religion as faith, hope, and charity. Only "to him that overcometh" does Jesus hold out "the tree of life," "triumph over the second death," the hidden manna, "the white stone and the new name," the power over the nations and the morning star, "the white robe and a name in the book of life," "a pillar in the temple of his God whereon is written the name of God," "New Jerusalem," and the "new name of the Lamb," and finally, "to sit down with Him on His throne." Away, then, with that religion which would dream itself away, or merely send up an echo of sentimental sympathy when the enemies of souls and God are pressing so hard. No, no, brethren; like John the Baptist we must come, and come in a power we receive from God. John came as John the Baptist, not John the priest. God loves to honor His glory in the man far more than the empty title of an office. It is God in man and not a title on man that is glorious; the splendor and not the name of a star that gives it rank in heaven.

But John came in the wilderness. He did not go to the temple or make any city synagogue his abode or college. In the wild virgin wilderness, unmarred by man's tool or purpose, he stands to call "the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." There are times when God must, as it were, seek a new starting point for His cause: when men, in their proneness to strip His laws and ceremonies of the spirit, cling with idolatrous superstition to the dead formality; when they spend their time in garnishing the sepulchral form of what was once a living, moving, loving reality, but which by their want of heart they have put to death as died the prophets of old, then God comes to teach them the meaning of the words, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice;" comes to proclaim anew that He is not a cold, cruel, heartless formality, rolling forward to crush the weakness of the broken reed and quench the spark in the smoking flax, but that He has a great, loving, tender, strong, true spirit, yearning with infinite compassion over this world of deep sorrow. When God comes to remove the obstructions of

man's coldness and cruelty, and touch humanity anew with the warmth of His heart, He loves to trample down dead forms and cause new life to burst from the mouldering heaps. He breaks the brazen serpent, and calls it "Nehushtan," a piece of brass (2 Kings 18 : 4). Abraham was led to the lone wilderness when he offered up Isaac in a figure. Jacob saw the heavens open for the first time as he lay on Bethel's lone stone. Moses must carry the children of Israel into the *wilderness* to receive the Law. Elijah must call them to Mount Carmel ere he brings their hearts back to Jehovah. John the Baptist must "cry in the wilderness" the dawn of the new dispensation. Jesus appoints, not Jerusalem the Jewish centre, not Athens the Grecian centre, not Rome the world's capital, but an obscure mountain in Galilee as the great centre from which His word moves forth, conquering and to conquer; for there he met the apostles by special appointment and ordered their great army. Yes, John came in the wilderness, as free as the eagles that cleft the air above him, subject to the commission of their God and his

God. He would raise no unnecessary question by entangling himself with the thousand petty formalities and dead ceremonies which the priestly school at Jerusalem cherished with idolatrous superstition. He would draw no self-righteous barriers whereby the publican, harlot, and sinner would be shut out from the ready access to the living word of the living God. He was sent to men and women of crushed lives and wounded hearts, and he would throw open the doors of his church as wide and free as the broad bosom of the wilderness. No man should dictate what kind of Gospel he should preach. He would cumber his ministry with no obligations save those he received when he took orders from the spirit of the living God. His Gospel should be as free and God-toned as the winds that swept through the crags of those mountains and the waters that rolled through the bosom of Jordan. It was meet and fit that the "kingdom of heaven" should sound its first cry in this bold independence and Godlike liberality and freedom. And woe to those men who, loving the favor of men more than the favor of God,

the patronage of men more than the salvation of their souls, dare narrow and exclude, barricade, fence off and classify when God sends them " to seek and to save that which is lost." Thus does God show that His power is not in the magnificence of surroundings or hoary associations ; but, " in spirit and in truth," warm, live, and sympathetic, it broods over the aching hearts of a world with the glorious invitation, " Whosoever will let him come and drink of the water of life freely."

CHAPTER VII.

LIFE IN ITS NAKED GRANDEUR—THE GLORY OF ITS PURPOSE CONQUERING EARTH.

"His meat was locusts and wild honey."—MATT. 3 : 4.

JESUS says, "Having food and raiment, therewith be content;" and there is no grander illustration of it than in His great servant (and to that time a man than whom none was greater), John the Baptist. No man can read the Bible account of John without feeling the majesty of his presence, the commandings of his power. He still holds sway over the multitudes, he still stands, but in the majesty of his might against sin. The voice that once echoed along the banks of Jordan and through the wilds of Judea now resounds through every valley and along every mountain-side of Christendom. John the Baptist still towers like some great stern granite mount, whose lofty, heaven-aspiring brow stands unmoved by

all the surges of ages or the tempests of centuries.

"His meat was locusts and wild honey," the plainest, simplest, cheapest food known among his people; and it made him strong, bold, and fearless. It gave him an independence which blanched not before kings nor quailed before the armies of a corrupt nation and age. Now though he was sent of God, and was filled with God's spirit from his youth up, yet he observed every law that tended to give him a heartier, grander manhood. He laid aside every weight to run the race set before him.

We gain independence by rising above the world. John had nothing to expect from earth's favor, and he feared nothing from its frown. He came to the banks of Jordan a conqueror. He came as one who had fought with the world and won the victory. He came forth to command, for he stood superior. What were earth's wants or glories to Him? He had learned to do without its abundance, and to rejoice without its luxuries. His soul came into the full realization of the truth that

"man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God;" and in this God-won liberty he stood, mighty and grand. Earth had not given him his power, earth could not take it away. He had no Achilles' heel, no vulnerable point. He came from God, and suffered no worldly interest to stand between him and that God, no earthly hope or fear to blunt the point of his message or parry the force of his thrust, for God was great in him, and he was great in the world.

Surely there is a need for mighty men to-day. Surely the Church of God needs heroes after the type of John the Baptist. The world's oppressed millions need champions whose lives are full-armed and completely invulnerable to the powers of this world—men who seek nothing from its glories and fear nothing from its hatred. Then we are to look at the great laws of power whereby John the Baptist grew so strong. Jesus himself implies as much when he says, "The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from you, then shall ye fast." Jesus could eat and drink and be powerful, but John must abide

by the law. "This kind goeth out only by prayer and fasting." And we must grow strong as did John, we must gain power and overcome by observing the great laws of spiritual power and independence. John went to God for power, and looked on earth as an element of weakness. *We* go to the earth for power, and try to fight Goliath in Saul's armor. John, all his life long, was trying to reduce his earthly wants to the minimum; we try to increase them to the maximum. John tried to live above the power of man, that he might live more fully in the power of God. Do you not see that our great tendency to trust earth and earth's is one of weakness? Do you not see that we dare not rebuke sin as John the Baptist did, lest it be said to us, "Physician, heal thyself?" If, like those of Tyre and Sidon, our country is nourished by a worldly Herod's domains, we must try to keep peace (Acts 12 : 20). What we get from God, not from earth, makes us strong. They who have set their hearts on earthly attainments (and no one will spend a lifetime's toil to accumulate them who has not), must ever,

like the young ruler, go away sorrowing, to sunder the ties and break the cords with which they bind him.

We must overcome the world or it will overcome us. We must cast away every cherished prospect, and pull down every hope that prevents us or draws us back from following God with all our hearts. We must sacrifice idol after idol, hope after hope, cut cord after cord, and remove prop after prop, until we feel at liberty to speak and act for God, and God alone. We must realize there is a greatness that is not earth-born, there is a wealth earth cannot give nor take away, there is a power that rests not on the opinions of men nor dies with their disapproval, there is a life that leans on the arm of the living God, and that alone—a great, lofty, truth-girded, right-defending, fearless life, beyond the wiles and darts of earthly danger. And we must press on in it. But oh, how different from this world-loving life, that saps the character and weakens the hardihood of Christian manliness! We must achieve our independence *of* earth rather than *by* earth.

Its worth. Ah, it is worth something to stand with our souls elevated by the side of John the Baptist, face to face with truth and right, at perfect liberty to speak and act for them without fear or hesitation; to tread this earth in company with the great principles of God, nor stoop to defile our manhood in the dust of earthly abundance; to press on, seeking every moment the kingdom of God and His righteousness, hiding life in God; to be able to look at all earth's fickle rewards and dark threats unmoved, with a deep consciousness of safety, as the eagle from his Alpine height looks down on the flashing storm below. Yes, this brings a manhood deep and grand and lofty, a character that will stand single-handed against a world. Jesus knows where the source of true power dwells, and the secret paths thereunto, and His every command brings us nearer to the helm, but strips us of the power of man to clothe us with the power of God, and make our loneness in earth's arena companionship in heaven's host. By the very nakedness in which He calls us into the battle He incases us full, strong, and secure

in the whole armor of God. So "shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward" (Isaiah 58 : 8).

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHN'S OPINION OF HIS POWER.

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness."—MATT. 3 : 3.

THE true preacher is more than a mere sound. He is a voice, an utterance from life, and that the life of God. God really speaks, and speaks with a tone of power that awes. It was not John's elocution, but John's real living power that commanded those vast multitudes, and held them firm while the pealings of God's law thundered in their midst, arousing to an awful sense and trembling dread of condemnation. Yes, God has honored the human voice more than any other instrument to make earth feel the nearness and reality of His living presence. And powerfully did He so through the voice of John. People heard the voice of that lone man in all the sublimity of his naked grandeur,

and they felt that those tones broke from a mighty life within, that this was a voice, a living voice of a living power, and no dead echo from the charnel-house of formality. It was a cry alive with reality that men heard, startling the mountain wilds and echoing along Jordan's valleys.

But there is a phase of John's life we shall speak of here, though it be but a secondary idea in the text; for surely it was of no small consideration to John himself, and can never be to any great heart in life's struggles. And it is this:

John's loneliness in life. Yes, we realize his loneliness in those long years of wilderness conflict, from which he comes one of earth's grandest and truest heroes. But this loneliness when one removes from men to seek God is not the loneliness that bows spirits and breaks hearts, for there the soul goes for a communing and a companionship it is sure to find if in earnest. But when a heart has struggled through the delusions of its age, sailed out on the great sea of truth beyond the fogs and shoals that envelop and threaten the re-

ligion of the people, beyond the din of public and popular error, sees, feels, realizes, and roots itself in the hopes and powers of the new-found life, and then comes back seeking companionship—alas, how lonely!—'tis not "as one who treads alone some banquet hall deserted," but "as one who treads alone some banquet hall" full crowded, which is a far greater loneliness, and one that fills the soul with a deeper heart-ache, an intenser yearning for sweet companionship. John felt this. He stood alone, for he had gone many long heart-journeys through those days of soul-conflict in the desert; and though men could hear "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," none could come alongside the great soul of the lonely preacher. John lived alone with his God, but lived for his fellow-men. He was not a reed among reeds, nor a courtier in the midst of a court. His life stands out as one lone, grand, lofty mountain-peak among his fellow-men. Not even one word from his fond parents echoes to us of the days when his heart felt for companionship. There are no verdant scenes of life's young spring-tide to

soften the stern loneliness of this "more than a prophet, this man sent from God." He was "the voice of *one*," for there was no other heart on earth that saw and felt life as he did, save the heart of Jesus, and with this heart he communed far more in the solitude of prayer than in the halls of conversation or the walks of bodily contact.

Now here is a lesson that will help you and me in our conflicts and waitings. We all find, sooner or later, that as far as this world is concerned life is a great loneliness, and the deeper into its battles we press the fewer will be the spirits beside us, and the lonelier we will feel among men; yet this is God's way, and there is not one of the heroic characters in His word who did not tread this way.

To be true we must live much alone, and possess that power of soul which constantly hushes the storm and stills the surrounding tumult of men's aims and plans to hear the voice and see the way of God. We must set out fully reckoning on journeys of soul in which no other soul can accompany us, however yearning and pining our longings therefor

may be. We must be sure that we will have great, deep, heavy heart-burdens which we must take up and carry on all alone, save with Jesus. We must expect to stand in battles where much that is nearest and dearest in this life confronts us. If we are live Christians we will every day be compelled to wage war against those who crush the spirit of the Gospel by the formality of the Gospel—as one has truly said, "defend the spirit of the past against the institutions of the past;" and this with the heart-ache of loneliness. Ah! Jesus saw and felt all of this for you and me when He said, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake."

As we feel this great desolation, let us look on the heroic bearing of God's mighty ones gone before. See Abel by his lone offering; Enoch, in his lone, grand walks with God; Noah, as he stands alone toiling all those long years of faith, misunderstood and abused by all that saw him; Abraham, called out from among his people, and feeling the stern call of duty separating him from the companionship even of his own child. Jacob lived, as it were,

a life of loneliness from that night when, houseless and homeless, he lay and dreamed of God's accompanying angels at Bethel; no man from that day forward seems to have entered the great current of his life. Joseph triumphed in a strange land, and lived alone amid the court where he was idolized, and we hear this loneliness breaking out in the touching charge uttered from his death-bed, when he asks that his bones may be carried up from the land of Egypt at some far distant day and laid beside the dust of those great men whose souls' footprints his spirit had been following all through life, and to whom he felt nearer than to those who touched him in the body. Moses lived alone. Israel could catch only the aims, and now and then see the towerings of that soul. There was as really a veil over his heart as over his face, which men, because of their weakness, could not lift. And so Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, and all the prophets, thronged by men, yet alone they lived, for they stood, looked, and lived above and beyond the companionship of the souls about them; and while this very loneliness was one

of life's hardest, it was also and is still one of its grandest and most heroic pages and loftiest battle-fields. But there is no loneliness that compares for one moment with that which Jesus suffered. Of a truth "He trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with Him." Misunderstood all through life—for His great soul lived way up where man's as yet cannot reach, though each century is rolling the bosom and heart of Christendom nearer His own—we see and feel the life and light of Jesus permeating and touching the heart of humanity as the sun of spring does the heart of nature, and gradually yet grandly we begin to see and feel the purposes of His great life lighting and touching humanity into life and beauty.

But this loneliness of life has an end for God's children. In that "glorious rest that remaineth for the people of God, "where many shall come, from north, east, south, and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, then loneliness will be gone, and gone forever, and these great hearts that have been made heroic in

their mighty lone battles and burdens of life shall meet and have each other forever; for heaven is not only a putting together of God's own true great ones, but also a joining of God's great, deep dealings with our souls. We are all members one of another, and when Jesus, our head, shall unite us, "every joint" shall supply its joy and power. Then shall we meet the heroic spirit of our beloved John the Baptist, and love it all the deeper and stronger for its brave, lone stand it made for you, for me, for truth, for God, in the days when the "kingdom of heaven suffered violence." Till then the future hope is strong enough for us when our Lord is with us, and He hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Yes, He lives in life's inner chamber, in the soul's deepest battles, burdens, and hopes, until we are ready and clothed with immortality, to see, meet, and be like Him, and with Him enter into the fulness of joy; for by Him we will be led into the deepest companionship of every spirit in heaven.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REST OF SINCERITY.

"Repent ye."—MATT. 3 : 2.

THIS was no less the requirement of God than the need of man. John's faith-lit vision saw by the light of God's goodness this deep need of the human soul, and these words, strange as it may seem, were the call to rest. Man hates to repent, hates to set the seal of disapproval on his own doings; his proud heart smarts and burns at the thought, for he wants to be counted true and right before men, even when he knows that within he is false and wrong. He does not want earth to see his foulness and shame. Yet he must repent ere that spirit within him can have rest, ere he can look himself square in the depths of his soul and say, "Thou art now an honest man." Painful as it is, the thorn must be withdrawn ere the wound can heal; the cor-

ruption must be found out ere the ulcer's pain will cease. So they who would preach only a soft, soothing gospel are cruelly false. They would cry "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." They would talk soothingly to the deep agonies of a heart without extracting the serpent's fang. They would try to pillow the soul on a lie, and soothe the prodigal while he sits feeding the swine and perishing of hunger. Ah! that boy must go back to his father, and go back with a heart conscious of his sonship, scarred, marred, and shamed, but conscious at last of an honest sincerity down beneath it all that he is true of heart.

I once asked a Roman Catholic priest, "Suppose one came to confession and only told you a part of the sin, hiding the rest from you, and you became conscious of it, what would you do?" "Have nothing to do with the hypocrite," he said. Every sinner is a hypocrite until he confesses to God his sin, and he is guilty until he repents. Mercy cannot heal the heart-wounds of sin until they are repented of. She cannot separate the sins from the sinner until the sinner hates the sin and

disclaims it as a part of himself. A man may come and plunge a dagger into my body with intent to slay. As he withdraws it, dripping and warm with my blood, I may say, "I forgive you;" but that pardon takes no effect, carries home no peace, so long as he repents not; he must be a murderer, and blood must stain his soul; yet the instant that soul disclaims the foul deed and throws it from him, that instant he ceases to be the man he was, and may embrace my forgiveness. His soul and mine may meet as new beings and with new hopes; meet with a rest sweet and deep in proportion to the sincerity of faith with which he repents and I forgive, and our trust in each other's sincerity. Had John taken counsel with the wise (so called) men of his age they would doubtless have counselled a very different course, just as their representatives do now. Go softly, speak gently, persuade without offence, give mercy, but talk not of judgment. Ah! John cared too much for man and God to listen for one moment to such suicidal policy. He saw the hearts of men, saw sin gnawing hungrily at their souls,

saw their inner strifes, and heard the dull sighings of the sufferers, and boldly and grandly he called out the remedy: "Repent ye." The inner life and its great future were the most important things he saw in man or for man, and like one true to his fellow-men he calls for the uprising of good and the downcasting of evil in them. He called the prodigal to rise and come face to face with his sin, that he might press heart to heart with his father. To him there was no shame in repenting wrong that he might be right, but there was death and eternal shame in hiding sin that he might be forever wrong.

The heart of the people responded to the trueness of John as the heart of one man. "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." Oh, people do want honest, brave, true, strong dealings with the realities of time and eternity. This question of salvation is, after all, one men cannot shake entirely off, nor can they completely hush the voice of conscience. Down deep in the human heart

there is a capacity for a hereafter: the possibilities of heaven or hell set about with the thoughts of immortality and eternity; and when a preacher, nerved by the spirit of the living God, rises strong and great enough to press through all the dead formalities and soul-deluding ritualism which have for a long time hid the deep, festering wounds within, such a preacher will be heard. The witness within men's own bosom will cry "It is the truth; I know it, I feel it." John came and found just such a state of things. Pharisee, scribe, lawyer, and priest had been feeding the hungry souls on the dry husks of a lifeless and burdensome formality; but John called them back along the plain path of truth toward the Father's house, and humiliating as was the path of repentance, it was warmed with a sympathy of trueness and lighted with the liveness of hope that they had sought but failed to find in all the tangled forms and requirements of men's traditions. Men went away from the baptism of John with a perceptible sense and realization that they had made a stride toward God, and stood nearer, stronger

and more hopefully in His presence than when they came. The morning dew of the Gospel dispensation was fresh upon the ministry of John, even though the day had not yet dawned, and it breathed a fragrance of life they had never felt as they turned away from the death-scenes of blood-bathed altars, where slain bulls and goats could never take away sins.

It was indeed a day-dawn upon the souls of men when they heard and felt that by God's grace hearts might arise, and by the great mercy of God renounce and forsake the sins from which all the ceremonials on earth could not cleanse. Yes, this was a day that proclaimed the royal priesthood of man himself, and drew him near to his God as a man. And they who would be mighty in the hands of God "to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just" must ever labor to bring man face to face with his God and his Father. Grand and true to the needs of the human heart was that message of Jesus, "to ascend to my God and your God, my Father and your Father." Yes, as men listened to

these words, and words like these, calling them to the sympathy and confidence of God, leading their souls up to trust Him through all their imperfections, and to lay open before Him their deepest and sorest defects, assured that the good within them will be recognized and the trueness in them matured into stronger, deeper life: I say, when men hear of these great callings from lips of deep sincerity, if there is any trueness, any remaining life, it will respond. And if you add, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and throw wide the doors to an endless life to all true believers, then will the sincere penitent rush into it as if by violence, as they did in the days of John and Jesus.

Thus, and thus only, comes that deep heart-rest that remaineth for the people of God. This is the path along which those who "labor and are heavy laden" come to Jesus for that rest. Yea, "Blessed are the pure in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

CHAPTER X.

"For the kingdom of heaven is at hand."—MATT. 3 : 2.

NOT only did John unloose and cast away the heavy soul-burdens of past wrong and sin by leading men to sincere repentance, but he opened to the yearning heart the hope of a better future in these words : "For the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He dealt truly, strongly, restfully, and grandly with the past, hopefully, heroically, and gloriously with the future. If there is in the very nature of man, woven into his very woof of being, a capacity to suffer and agonize over the past wrongs sin has wrought on his soul, and he upon men and God—yes, if there is that something in every bosom which makes the torments of a future hell possible, which yields fuel for the unquenchable flame, and food for the undying worm—thank God there is also another something in man, as deeply and truly a part of his inner soul and being, a

capacity for the rest, purity, power, and communion of eternal years which makes heaven and God's fellowship a possibility. "Repent ye" escapes the past, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" opens the future. It is the answer to those words Job spoke for a world of human hearts when he said he longed to be where "the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest."

John had not gotten a one-sided idea of man during those long years of deep communing with his God. He came forth from the wilderness of fasting and praying, not a cold, hard, cynical judge of human nature, for he had been too true to himself and too near to his God for that. If in the clear light of that close approach to God he had seen and felt with terrible reality man's fall, he had also seen and felt just as clearly and powerfully the hope of his rise again, and the majesty of his God-traced image on his soul. Yes, this he saw at a burning focus and preached with a startling emphasis. He spoke not as a Plato or Socrates, reasoning out the necessity of a hereafter, but as "a man sent from God," and seeing

the realities of God. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." These are the words of one who feels the presence of the King.

God in the vastness of his love has so constituted us that we may press through the thick mists of years and realize the life and joy of what is to come, to the finite mind, but what is one eternal *now* to the infinite. We are startled as we read of the vivid expectation which took hold of the lives of those great men of God's word—expectations, yea, realizations, which to the worldly mind seem actually nothing; but, despite all this, which lifted up and bore on the souls of their possession upon the current of life, strong, grand, vivid, and glorious, almost blending them with those of the angels of God. We hear of Abraham going out to the land of promise, one foot of which he never received, save as a burial-place. We read of Moses refusing the treasury of Egypt, yet living and toiling as an exile shepherd. But why enumerate? for we have but to turn to the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and read the great honor roll, which profane history may strive through all time to

match, but strive in vain. Now Jesus speaks of this very mystery when He says, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it, and was glad." And after Christ had gone back to His Father we hear the apostles speaking as if they thought His second coming were very, very near. They, according to His own express command, went down into the valley with trimmed lamps and joyous hearts, as virgins go into the wedding-feast. And we ask, What mean all these strange delusions? Ah, friends, they are no delusions, but living, glorious realities, that open up before the soul's rejoicing vision as it reaches on into the realm of the spiritual and eternal and stands face to face with the joyous unchangeableness of God. When the lawyer, who grasped the trueness of our Lord's words as He spoke of loving God with all the soul, mind, and heart, said, "Master, thou hast said the truth," the reply of Jesus was, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." Yes, the kingdom of God is within you, and as that inner life responds to and blends with the life of God, things present and things to come are united. Heaven

touches the present, and "the kingdom of God is at hand." Blessed is that man whose faith annihilates time, brings the weight and joy of eternity down upon the life he now lives, and, Enoch-like, walks with God; for he scarcely feels the great weight of wrong in the patient waitings for right; but his sin-encompassed soul, seeing and realizing so clearly and vividly the sway of God's sure, true judgments and rewards, rests, and for him oppressed time is swallowed up in righted eternity.

John the Baptist was just such a man. He lived, spoke, worked, and endured as seeing His and Him who is invisible; and he called men up to his side, and with a clear voice and steady hand pointed their weary, tossed souls to the life before his faith-lit vision.

In that day, as in all others, there were many who could not follow him fully, and some who would not attempt to follow. It is an awful power that God has left in the hands of men, to annihilate their capacity for realizing Him, and little by little increasing the distance between them and God until they exclaim, with their hearts at war against God's

purposes, as their great prototype Balaam, "I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh;" and still pressing on away from God they descend into that deep darkness, and stand beside the man David so terribly describes when he says, "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." Yes, believe me, it takes education to produce this midnight darkness within. I have never heard the most ignorant or degraded heathen whom I have met, and they have been many, doubt that there was a God—some kind of a God. It is only for the soul hardened and rehardened in the glorious light of truths brighter than day to descend to this degradation. It is the voice of the prodigal son despising the long-enjoyed bounties of a father's love, speaking as he goes away from that great love.

No wonder that plain hearts, dealing with the stern realities of a sin-cursed world, should crowd around the great preacher as words like these fall glowing from his burning heart. I tell you, the great vivid realizations of a preacher's heart mark his power more surely than the cold science of his reasoning. Man

will believe what his heart clasps, and rejoices in it more quickly than for what his head gropes. John spoke from point-blank contact, and fired directly at the mark of human need and human hope, and he sent the truths of God crushing sin and conquering despair, until the nation rejoiced in his light, and felt the contact of higher, purer, liver, better things. And the hearts of the disobedient, thus touched, yearned for and turned to "the wisdom" and the life "of the just."

CHAPTER XI.

RADICALNESS OF JOHN'S PREACHING.

"The axe is laid unto the root of the trees."—MATT. 3 : 10.

JOHN'S soul was too deep in the spirit of his God to hide that God's purposes by formality. He had studied God as a living God, and had felt the beatings of His heart as clearly as he had seen the tracings of His hand, felt the yearnings of His love as strong as the splendors of His reason. He knew that God was more than a form : He was a life, and behind every plan was a purpose, from every tree there must come fruit. He once more went back as close to God as were Adam and Eve before the fall, who heard and felt the living presence moving amid the garden scenes ; and as he entered this presence-chamber of the King, and felt the measureless tides of His love sweep through and over his soul, he was lifted by these powers up above and borne by

them on beyond those men-teachers' cold, formal, "washing of cups," tithes of mint, anise, and cumin," buildings and garnishings of prophets' sepulchres. This it was that gave him power at one mighty stride and with a steady hand to lay the axe at the root of the tree, and speak those terrible words of warning, breaking like herald thunders before the judgment crash. Coming straight from God to "prepare the way of the Lord," his warnings fell like the echoes of the Judge's own voice on the barrenness of the souls of men.

He who is more afraid of disturbing the man-grown fungus about the ordinances of God than he is about their dishonoring the nature, purpose, mercy, and love of that God, can never be a reformer. A reformer is no patcher of ordinances, no compromiser with men, no conservative man; he must be "a man sent from God," and his soul must be entirely pervaded, overwhelmed, and swept on by the aims, will, and nature of Jehovah. Thus, John did not descend among men to criticise their ritualism or discuss their inextricably tangled formalities. He stood in the pres-

ence of God, and proclaimed the doom of all fruitlessness, come from what source it might, and through what countless combinations, conclusions, contortions, or neglects it might; God had not been honored, and it must die.

It is marvellous how Satan deludes and damns men with worry and perplexities about details. When Jesus told Martha "one thing was needful," He spoke a great law of safety, and that one thing is man's relation to his God. The compass must be correct, else all the worry and care about the rigging and canvas cannot hold the ship true to her course. So men must not make barren the ordinances, yea, the great heart-purposes of God, with their traditions. They must ever open His blessed word with the voice, echoing deep down in their hearts, "He will have mercy and not sacrifice," struggling on up to be the children (with all the tenderness, liveness, and fulness of a child's love) of their "Father which is in heaven."

John laid his hand with the stroke of a giant against all the false securities and relationships of a deluded materialism. Men had long been

falling back upon the fact that they were children of Abraham, and trusting that God's love for Abraham would prove efficacious to them; and all of this, too, in the very teeth of the prophet's utterance, "*The* soul that sinneth, *it* shall die." John crushed that hope as with a sledge-hammer of truth: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Do not go back to the past for safety; press on toward the mark until the race is won.

Ah, it is a sad day for individual, state, or church when the eye of hope turns to the past; when weakened children, sapped of energy, enterprise, and hardihood, lean on their ancestors for support. "Your claim to sonship," says St. John, "must be ratified by like nature ere it is good." In the higher life of God's kingdom, spiritual kinship alone lives. A true Lazarus, beggar though he be, may pillow his head on Abraham's bosom, while a princely Dives, claiming the sonship of Abraham, is told there is an impassable gulf be-

tween them. Thus the very stones may, by God's power, assume a nature more in harmony with that of God's kingdom than the hearts made harder than stones by abused love. Yes, thus spake the leather-girded preacher, and shook the foundations of men's belief. He crushed the empty casket, and showed its emptiness before their deluded souls. Truly did he prepare men to ask for Christ, without whose life-giving love, warming, fruit-producing power, all their trusted system was but a shadow, a soul delusion.

The same God, before whom John stood and spoke that day on the banks of Jordan, stands now here behind each professing heart, each religious system. His nature has not changed, His purpose has not shifted. His religion sent abroad into the world has been rebaptized in the blood of His only-begotten Son. Not only does He lay the axe at the root of the tree, but with His pruning-knife He passes through the branches, cutting away all fruitlessness. To-day you own Him as your King; but, as in John's time, so now, you must prove it; your mere word is not sufficient;

the currents of life and onsets of the enemy are too strong and real for mere idle words or emotions. Simon Peter gave his word he would sooner die than betray Jesus, but in the dawn of day he had denied Him thrice. Ah! men, devils, and God demand proof of your sincerity, and that proof is fruit; not an act or two, but the result of a live nature in full play. Yes, it is a nature. We "know a tree by its fruit." "Ye do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles." You must be good to yield good, live Jesus to show the power of Jesus. We must attend to the roots of a tree to make it good. As the roots are hidden from sight, so the sources of a Christian's power are hidden within him —that inner devotion when the soul, in the great strength of secret love and confidence, lays hold of God. The outside world must not, cannot intermeddle here. "Ye are the temple of the living God." Yes, your heart is that true inner sanctuary where hourly sacrifices and incense are offered up. It is bringing thought, will, hope, love, feeling, and bathing them in the sweet, deep purposes of

God. Look to your great silent moments of life, your moments of hushed inner devotion, of which David spoke when he said, "All my well springs are in thee." Like Samson, so long as your strength is a sweet secret between your heart and your God, so long will you be mighty in the armies of Jehovah.

Here, at the beginning of the Gospel, we see the axe laid at the root of the tree, and hear God pledged to cut down the barren cumberers. Way over in the evening twilight, just as the "sun of righteousness" is about to set in a sea of blood, we see the withered fig-tree beneath the curse of the Son of God, as if His soul reaches forward and brings a part of the judgment before its time to warn His Church of the doom of unfruitfulness. This was a fig-tree—the right name, the right leaf, but not the right result from God's used blessings; and hence the curse of Jesus went withering to its very roots. Christianity must be live, and real, and conquering, or Jesus will remove the candlestick. We are as deeply concerned with the very tap-root of God's nature as was John the Baptist, for our souls and our true-

ness are as really at stake as was his. Dead formality or cold orthodoxy are as blighting and blasting now as Phariseeism was then. Let the hand of the mighty man of God be laid on the innermost purposes of our lives, and the warnings of his God-opened lips keep us faithful and true. God is a living God, a God with a purpose, and that purpose burning with all the intensity and wideness and omnipotence of His nature. Narrow it not down, but seek the spirit of Christ until you are His, and feel Him in you the hope of glory, and life is "hid with God in Christ Jesus," there resting where "perfect love casteth out fear." Would you hear the purpose of God? God sent His Son into the world to save the world. Would you know the only tap-root by which you may live? "As my Father sent me, so send I you."

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL LIFE OF HIS DAY.

"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"—MATT. 3 : 7.

JOHN THE BAPTIST was a man of great, tender, warm heart, and this gave the despised, ostracised publicans and outcast harlots access to him, and gave him power to lead them up to the kingdom of God in forces like a besieging army; which scene made Jesus exclaim, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Yes, the people felt the heart of John beating warm and close to theirs. But there was one class among them, and they are among the men of every generation, who found the fierce burnings of a fiery indignation flashing forth from the lips of John like the sword of the cherubim. That class was the Pharisees and Sadducees. Those were the names they bore in

John's day ; but they live on under a thousand names, but ever the same nature, and it is the spirit and not the name at which the Baptist hurls God's message of indignant condemnation. Now, what was that spirit, which from the days of Cain until this moment has called forth the fiercest anathemas of the living God, and stands most repugnant to the very essence of His nature, the spirit of His being? They are the idolaters of ecclesiastical ritualism, blind votaries of religious formalism, who stand ready to roll their idols on with fanatical speed, like a Juggernaut, over all that is tender, and weak, and live, and loving, and true in human hearts, pleading for mercy or craving to be loyal to their God, yet not seeking or not craving in the grooves and ruts of the prevailing system. Yes, they press on in cold-blooded, mechanical blindness, crush the ties and tendrils that entwine souls to their God, and yet do all in the name of God : men who can see nothing but their own narrow idea of God ; men who cannot learn what means, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" ; men who can cry of the Lamb of God Himself, "We have

a law, and by our law he ought to die. Crucify Him! crucify Him!" Such men were met, as they drew near the second Elijah, with the startling, scathing greeting, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Of all men who need, and which the good of humanity demands, a bold, unsparing, and full-exposing denunciation, it is the wrongdoers in high position; but, alas! how seldom does he get it, unless there is some man sent from God, bold and self-sacrificing enough to challenge the might of these Ahabs, like Elijah and John, rend the veil of thin hypocrisy, and show the world their inner vileness, "full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness," as Jesus said.

Now, such men as the scribes and Pharisees are the enemies most to be dreaded in the Christian Church. John did not overstate the truth in calling these men "a generation of vipers." Up in that clear atmosphere of truth from which his soul looked down, the poison of their doctrine was realized to be more deadly than the serpent's fang: one but killed

the body, the other destroyed men's souls. There are men who deal not honestly with God and themselves, and they may be men with widely-differing creeds. In St. John's day no two sects appeared farther apart than Pharisees and Sadducees: one was the man struggling on under an overwhelming load of religious formality, the other denying the very existence of a hereafter at all. The Sadducee sprung as a reaction from the hollowness which he saw in the Pharisee, as infidelity will ever shoot a fungus from the trunk of a hollow-hearted religious formality. When men see professing Christians pretending there is a power where non-professors can see there is none, and demanding that burdens, the doctrines of men, be bound on human hearts as essentials to gain heaven: I say, when men see and feel this falsity they are apt to say, "All religion is a delusion; there is no soul or spirit; there is no hereafter." And so we have our Pharisee and Sadducee, our hollow-hearted Christian of formality and his companion the infidel springing from his side—a two-headed monster with the viper's fang.

No wonder John's soul was stirred within him when he saw the Pharisee, who had so long professed to need nothing greater than his countless forms, and denouncing as lost and degraded beings all who lacked these forms, stand before him and trembling under the burning power of his living word, ask food, heart-food, from the man sent of God. And then to see by the side of the proud Pharisee the infidel Sadducee, who said he needed nothing more than provisions for this short journey across earth, for there was nothing more beyond. Yet, despite this belief, the few remaining nerves of life within the soul trembled at the words of God, and responding to His power, did awake to a dim consciousness of a great hereafter.

Let us give John the Baptist full credit for sincerity in the astonishment which speaks through his words, "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Yes, who? Where had the self-confident formalist and the blind infidel heard, where had they seen a startling vision of coming wrath? What had broken through that sleep so near akin to eter-

nal death, and alarmed them? John was astonished to find the power of his message sounding to hearts so buried in sin. He hardly expected to see these bones, so dry, awake to life at his prophesying. Let us note the shape his wonder took; for, truly, God in mercy gave it a divine utterance.

"Who hath warned you to flee from *the wrath to come?*" John was a man that had no doubts of a hell, and that a hell to come—a dispensation when God's wrath would burst upon the spirit in horrors that made his great soul tremble for the sinner. And he saw already the wrath of God in vivid flashes playing before these terrible sinners, and he spoke as a true herald of God and a true friend of man. He had felt a sad, hopeless conviction about the doom of these men, and spoke it out candidly, when he saw them, too, rushing toward the city of refuge. He gave them a strong, honest pull when he told them, "Begin not to say within yourselves, We are the children of Abraham," but fly with all your power to the mercy of the living God.

Have we been as honest, as live, as true, and

as great in our dealings with sin and men? Have we stood as close to God in our realizations of truth? And talked of the "wrath to come" with the courage of faithful sentinels on Zion's walls? Jesus, our King, fully reiterated the teaching and warnings of John on these very sins, when He hurled the terrible thunders of His seven woes against them, with a scathing, withering power that makes the heart of faith feel as if it already stood amid the bursting realities of the day of wrath. John's skirts will be clear of the blood of these sinners, as they move on, one long black column, down parallel to the march of the Church of God, but into the woes of sure death.

But where will the timid, doubting preachers or witnesses stand, who dared let men go on day after day, year after year, by their very side, into the jaws of death, and never spoke out boldly? Could a Dives come back to preach, his text would be but one, and his sermon forever the horrors of the "wrath to come."

CHAPTER XIII.

JOHN THE BAPTIST TO THE SOCIAL LIFE OF HIS DAY.

"And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise."—LUKE 3 : 10, 11.

RELIGION and life in all its departments are united. They must go together, as vitality must move through the organism of the human body. Yes, back of all these duties and cares, back of all these joys and sorrows, back of all these hopes and fears, stands God. This was that something which scribe, Sadducee, and Pharisee had in common with the harlot, publican, soldier, and common people, that sent them in one body to this "man sent from God." Each wanted to know what message his King had sent unto him, what new light would flash along each respective path of life from the source of all

life. We have heard that message of John to the ecclesiastic (of which we may say more hereafter), and it is noticeable that his dealings with them come nearer those of our Lord than with either of the other two classes, for they appear so hardened in selfishness and sin that there was little for them save the calling of their remaining consciousness to the terrors of the wrath to come. They were too far gone to be reached by an appeal to the glories and powers of the life that now is, and the eternal weight of glory of that which is just before us. Hence they appear more like the condemned than the children of hope, and the storm of wrath blackens above them as they advance along the line to the logical and inevitable conclusion of their principles—viz., war against Jesus in the very essence of His being.

In the treatment of the social and civil life there is a striking difference between John and Jesus—the difference between the evening's twilight of a dying dispensation and the bursting dawn of a new dispensation. That difference may be briefly, comprehensively, and lively summed up in one word—"Father." John

does not dwell upon the fatherhood of God; but Jesus makes this the great central sun of His system, that which must hold all the bodies and forces thereof in their orbits by its gigantic might, and yet draw each and all on in grand, harmonious action by its intense life, and light every one's self and path with a glory peculiarly its own, and still a beam of splendor from this great "Father of Lights." It would seem that this very difference between the life and teachings of John and His life and teachings was playing in full force through the Saviour's mind when the disciples came and asked Him to "teach them to pray, as John taught his disciples." The lips of Jesus opened, and from the fulness of His soul He breathed the eternal words, "Our Father"; the glorious voice of the Christian morn breaking after the shadows of the Mosaic twilight.

Yet there was something of the life, glow, and warmth of God's nearness in the words of John that called the hungering souls and burdened hearts of the multitude to him. He had the true light and glow of the true Sun, and its fires played through the evening clouds,

lighting them with the glories nearest akin to its own, just as it departs; so the evening twilight of the old dispensation was lighted from the true glory of one side of that Sun of Righteousness, soon to rise with healing on His wings, shining "brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

We now turn to watch this light play along the walks and through the lives of men, who felt the kindling glow of its powers firing their bosoms, and lighting their hopes to higher, truer, livelier realizations of themselves and God. These awakened emotions burst forth from the lips of the crowds as they mingle in the vast multitude and press up to John with the question, "What shall we do then?" These are words from hearts no longer content to rest on the mere *opus operatum* of religion; men whose souls had seen really, but it may be dimly, that religion was a personal, individual relationship of life to God, as well as the motions of a vast organism. If the fatherhood of God had not as yet risen clearly, warmly, lovingly, and hopefully before their souls, the royal priesthood of man confronted them like

the dim outlines of an obscure but ever-advancing figure, and men began to move and rejoice at that which they found within themselves, at the same time trembling before the majesty of their own being. They had touched the vast sea of human life. Their opening eyes beheld the ceaseless, boundless sweep of its God-filled fulness, and they fain would catch the pulsations of its mighty tides. "What must we do then?"

Now, let us ever bear in mind that this is not the question of men seeking Christ, but of men seeking all that is noble and pure and true in man; men reaching up for the full stature of their manhood under the reviving consciousness of the mighty truth that "in the image of God made He man," and that God had breathed from His own nostrils the breath of His life into him. Whatever, therefore, men may say or think of Jesus, Christianity, or any system of religion, this question before us is one that belongs to the lips and must rise from the heart of every true man, as *man*. And the answer of such a character as John the Baptist, who was the greatest

of woman born, in the glory and majesty of his manhood towered above prophets, priests, warriors, and kings, standing by the side of Jesus as earth's loftiest mountain-peak stands beside, reaches highest up into the falling sunlight. Grand above his fellows, glorious in his splendor, the answer of such a man must weigh mightily in the balance of human judgment. It was a question John was peculiarly fitted to answer, for it was one he had grappled and wrestled with through all that awful, lone intensity of his wilderness life—wrestled with until he, too, might truly be named "Israel," an Israel without a shrunken thigh. Can we for a moment stand close enough to hear the heart-beat of this great man, as this mighty question of living is laid before him for an answer? How awfully grand must have been that moment of life to John! As he looked into the vast consequences of living lighted up before him by the truth of God's own nature; saw heaven with all the consequences of right, and hell with all the horrors of wrong, one beaming with the intensity of love and the other with the intensity of justice; and in the

Eternal Presence to feel the heart of humanity asking his own, "What shall we do then?" surely, it must have made him clasp the hand of his God more firmly with the grip of faith as his inner soul cries out, "Lord, who is sufficient for these things?" Whatever may have been the power or depth of inner emotions, no outer token tells. It may be that he had so truly, vastly, and victoriously grappled life and its broad consequences in his lone wrestlings that now he speaks as the victor and not the combatant. His words are those of a man looking the sublimity of every-day-life squarely in the face, and feeling its glory as a living presence. "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." How true to God's own nature! It is almost as if we stood in the garden of Eden four thousand years ago and saw the hand of the Almighty wrapping the sin-stripped body of humanity, girding it with strength, and nerving it with sympathy for life's hard struggle.

This sent the multitudes home, not with a new formality, but with a deeper, livelier, near-

er sense of the brotherhood of humanity. In these words we hear John, as it were, calling the hearts of men into one vast family, ready to hand them over to their great "Elder Brother," who would joyously lead them to the face of their long-lost Father. He gives them an essential principle, without which they cannot lay hold of the "fatherhood of God." Here, then, in the very root of human life, down deep in man's essential nature, his very kinship to God, rises all the obligations upon which Jesus lays His kingly hand, and to which He speaks with His kingly authority, when He says, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Put the fatherhood of God behind these, and we have the power behind the organism which is to sweep the Church on through the vast, grand fields of her militant and missionary existence, and enthrone her power in that kingdom "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man," but which God has prepared for her as the "Queen-bride" of his own "king-Son."

CHAPTER XIV.

JOHN THE BAPTIST TO THE NATIONAL LIFE OF MAN.

"Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages."—LUKE 3: 12–14.

GOD is not only the God of the individual. He is this in a sense that no other power ever dared to be. He never loses sight of the individual good for the benefit of the mass, never is content that ninety-nine should be in the fold so long as one is missing; and so He never sets the seal of His approval on any system, ecclesiastical or political, which mars the glory of individual manhood or forgets the man for His system. But, beyond all this, God is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Judge of the whole earth, and Je-

hovah is a man of war, God of hosts, Commander-in-chief of all armies; and whatever may be the trait of national life, it must, if true, find its source in our God. Further, as the Church of God does her perfect work, just in that proportion will her life pervade the state, not by the out-reaching of an arbitrary hand, and laying hold of the reins; for all such attempts it is written, "He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword"; but she shall pervade the hearts and spirits of the legislative and executive departments, as the pure atmosphere pervades their bodies, giving health, joy, beauty, and power to all in a boundless, silent, living greatness.

There was something in the words and presence of that Wilderness Preacher that reached and touched with living power all that was live in church or state. And that life within the state leaped glad response to his warm touch, felt a nearness, a kinship to him, and an obligation and sympathy in his message, that scribe or Pharisee could not awaken, nor feed when once awakened. So we see, in the eager, anxious crowd pressing hard to get a word

from the lips of this great man in whom burned a living soul, the worldly, tricky tax-collector, and the rough, overbearing, turbulent soldier, followed, by and by, by the King Himself. It is a vast mistake to imagine that the love of God and the pleadings of His spirit do not follow men and women into haunts of life long after the scorn of a Pharisaic society has set its seal upon them. Salvation stood much nearer the house of Zacharias, and entered it much sooner than it did the homes of many a self-righteous Jew. In my own brief but intense ministry among the lowest grades of sinners, I have been startled at the reality of God's presence to the consciences of these sinners. One may well find a record here, as a flash of light from a dark place. A brother had asked me to visit a brothel, where he heard his lost sister lay dying. I went, inquired if such a woman were there, and was answered, "Yes." "Is she sick?" "Yes, but able to walk." I asked to see her. In a few moments a young woman of nineteen, with the pallor of consumption on her face, entered. Everything in her appearance bore the mark of

rigid and determined resistance to any attempt toward her soul's salvation. I arose and asked her if she were the sister of my friend. "Yes," was the cold and indifferent reply. "I have come, at his request, to see you, and to tell you that your brother J— committed suicide this morning, and is now lying a corpse at his house. "I know it," she coldly said. My soul was appalled. I had never seen one, man or woman, so young, yet buried in such apparent cold-blooded stolidity. Fixing my eyes on her face, I saw the gathering shadows of death surely deepening there. A tender, sad pity pierced my heart and pervaded my innermost being. Like a flash of lightning the stroke of pity rent the veil of stolid indifference from her heart, and it burst forth in a flood of bitter tears and deep, agonizing sobs. I sat in silence until she was able to speak, and then she told me her heart's sad story, and showed the unmistakable evidences that the Good Shepherd had never ceased to seek His lost sheep even in a den so vile and so low. She said, "I have been in this life of shame eighteen months, and now I am dying. I know it,

and shall soon be gone ; but though I am here, do not think my soul is at rest. I cannot now, and never have been able, to go to that front window and look upon innocent people pass. A few Sunday evenings ago I was in my room and heard the people in the next house singing. It was one of my old Sunday-school hymns ; it went straight to my heart. I lay and wept bitterly in the lone dark night." Such were her words, and in a few short days she was gone. I have often gone back to the scene, for it has framed for me one of the most tender, faithful, and loving pictures of my Saviour's long suffering and seeking love. And whenever the enemy of men whispers to me that this or that man or woman is beyond redemption, I look at this poor fallen girl, and hear the voice of Jesus from her inner life saying, " I am still pleading." It was this in the life of St. John, but infinitely more in the life of Jesus, that enabled Him to reach and woo the outcasts from society's cold, cruel, hard hand. This recognition of the depth of God's reach of mercy by John permitted Jesus to testify of his ministry : " The

publicans and harlots believed him ;" yea, went into the kingdom of God before the hard-hearted, respectable men and women who spurned and scorned them. Men judge sinners and sins by their antagonism to the established fashions of society, but God by the deadening power on the soul. And when John came from God he brought a large share of God's sympathy and trueness in dealing with the sinner and his sin. Yes, he brought to his ministry a soul, on which was deeply graven, " God will have mercy and not sacrifice." Thus commissioned, he dared approach the inner courts of men's lives with his message, and approached with the stride of power and word of authority, the power and authority of love.

We turn now to look at the publicans as they gathered around John. Long had they been outcasts from the Temple's religion, and perhaps had learned to hate as bitterly as they were hated ; that very hatred gathering vitality by a consciousness of the fact that their treatment, in the name of God, was contrary to the nature of God. But one day a messenger

passes and tells a strange story. There is a strong man down by the Jordan preaching, and he knows nothing of these refined distinctions of sins so rife in Jewish society. That is news to the publicans. There is something in this man they have been waiting for, and so they crowd around him. His bold, honest, open-hearted and heart-opening words assure them, and they are ready to accept him as their leader. The very manhood of the man commands them, for there can be no degenerate religion without begetting degenerate men, and no reformation of religion without reformation of manhood; for as the heart is so will the man be. Thus, touched along the whole line of life by the life powers that played and flashed from this man of God, they come, asking,

"What shall we do?" There is a directness, a practical earnestness that promises at once living co-operation. It isn't so much what shall we believe, or whom follow, or with what formality shall our faith be clothed; but the question was a live question, asking boldly for a live religion: What shall we *do?* They

grasped at once the great truth : a man's life is his creed ; and anticipated Jesus when He said, " By their fruits ye shall judge them."

The answer of John is no less direct and honest than their question : " Exact no more than that which is appointed you." A brief, strange catechism, a very limited survey of life's duty, and that negative in its obligation. How do we account for this meagreness ? The answer is, John stood between two dispensations, and was not laying the law down for either, but was ever conscious that his Lord came close after him, with His fan in His hand, and who would baptize " with the Holy Ghost and with fire." He was holding men's lives ready to respond when he should cry, " Behold the Lamb of God." And then, too, like a wise physician, he knew that the medicine which was to cure the sin-sick soul could not all be taken at a dose. This one sentence sent them home to a vast work of reformation—a work that would enlarge their longings for more of God's grace, and so prepare them for Christ. This brief sentence may have planted the seed which unfolds for a world the characters

of a Martha and a Zacharias; and if to-day its full force could be brought down upon modern business life, the homes of thousands and hearts of millions would be unburdened, while many lives would be exalted to the feet of Jesus. In John's day this would send a reformation through the entire system of civil oppression, and make him a benefactor of his people. The oppressed people without felt the trueness, courage, and greatness of the charge, while the more oppressed publicans felt the call, ringing like a clarion-peal, through their lives, and calling them up to true manhood.

We now come to face John and the soldiers on the banks of Jordan, and we do so with deep emotions of sympathy. Only they who have been buried in a classification of men until all individuality and sympathy seems hid from the outer world can appreciate fully the wild beatings of a soldier's heart for that warmer and clearer life of sympathy which recognizes his individuality and never forgets he is a man with a heart in him. I shall never forget my soldier years, when men would send

me to their kitchens to warm my hands, or to their barns to sleep, with an air of satisfaction on their faces which spoke that they had done all my position demanded. Once, I remember well, riding along with a fellow-soldier. We were both covered with the ice of the prevailing sleet. Passing a house, we saw a pointer dog curled up on a rich door-mat, when my companion remarked, "It would be good to be somebody's dog." All soldier life was not like this, of course; now and then there were men and women who could see the man shine out through the dusty uniform, and hear the heart's soft beat above the sabre's clanging; and such moments to the memory are like diamonds set in emeralds, bright, fresh, and joyously flashing gladness and gratitude, on down the path of life upon the pilgrim heart. I think such must have been the moments to the Roman soldiers as they stood before John the Baptist and felt his great man-heart beating close beside their own, way down out of sight of the encasing mail that fenced them off from their fellow-men. And they, too, prompt to their life of action and obedience, ask,

"And what shall we do?" Here, again, we catch the true idea, flashing out from life's natural walks and duties, with a clearness which religious theorizers could not attain. God does not make religion for the schools alone, but for man, and lays it broadside of human life. The answer of St. John was direct and intensely practical, as it was fearless and manly, and true to individual, community, and state. The brotherhood of man must be recognized. The soldier must give that which he missed most out of his own life—individual right. He must be upright as a man, and preserve his manhood. Next, he was not "to accuse any falsely." There were to be no class wrongs. His citizenship was to be kept untarnished, and his truthfulness held sacred. Lastly, "be content with your wages." Here was loyalty and true independence; whoever wants more than his worth is dishonest. All through we trace one master idea: it is John seeking the individual and trying to stand him upright in the image of his God. And his power flowed out into the brawny arms of the state. Through the word he spoke, ecclesiastical life

had been pruned and exalted ; social life had been warmed and widened ; civil life had been purified and softened ; military life touched, made innocent, and ennobled ; all so softly and naturally, there was scarcely a jar or clash heard in the state, family circle, or by the camp-fire.

CHAPTER XV.

JOHN'S RECORD.

"He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias."—JOHN 1 : 23.

A MAN'S greatness depends on his forming a true estimate of himself and his duty to God and man. New life had burst forth from the wilderness preacher. It swept out to those so long slumbering in formality and self-security about the old dispensation. The priests and Levites of Jerusalem were startled, and soon had their representatives by the side of John the Baptist, examining his credentials. "I am not the Christ," says John; "I am not Elias; I am not that prophet," were the answers to their questions. They could not understand that God should permit such bold proceedings to any one less than these, and to show any new claim *was* less. The danger of all ages is the underrating

of present power and an adoration of the past, forgetting that God is a progressive God, ever advancing in new manifestations of power, and that these new manifestations require the livest watch of the whole powers of man to be recognized, grasped, and utilized to his good. God forbids the labelling of power. The demonstrations of His might are as numerous and varied as the stars of heaven. No two men yet have trod this earth with the same forces, playing for the same purpose, with equal proportions through their lives. Oh, if men would seek God in the present, and press toward Him in the future, what grand harmony would roll over this divided earth, and what a strong phalanx would be presented by the Christian front! When John answered "No," to their every question, the Jerusalem delegation then asked, "Who art thou? what sayest thou of thyself?" This brings before the Christian world John's own sublime idea of his own life: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as saith the prophet Esaias."

What an idea of life: how true, how grand,

how live, and how strong! This idea well befits the words of Jesus: "Among those born of woman, there is not a greater than John the Baptist." Here He discloses the source of that living power which was sweeping through the hearts of the nation with a mysterious force and thoroughness which astounded the crystallized ritual of the old dispensation. And though we have, in a previous lecture, spoken of the prophecy, in which formula John replies, yet that prophecy in his lips, as a reply to the questioners of life's power and aim, is clothed with a new, fascinating life to every one who would seek the true path of immortal glory—that exalted walk with God which makes eternal heroes.

John's opinion of himself. He was not the Christ, not Elias, not that prophet. He was no relic of the past. He came, not resting on the formalities nor fame of those who were gone. No ghostly light from the sepulchre's mouth came streaming its ghastly halo around his head, nor did any wild presumption of unreal powers vaunt in his professions. He was a man, but a live man, in living contact with

the living God; leaning not on Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, but on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. One touch from the light and glory of the living God is better than all the honors and splendors of the dead past. So John claimed a direct contact with and life from his God, held his own individuality, and God's willingness to honor and love that individuality. This gave him a conscious joy in his service, an elastic, bounding, glad step along the path of duty, every step of which he felt was directed by the interest and appreciation of God. Next his humble opinion of himself: simply a voice, an echo in the world's great void, a note in the great strife and conflict. He was a mere empty nothing, save as he heralded the will and message of God. Blessed realization, that exalts self to lean entirely on God! But though John realized his own nothingness without God, yet he never for one moment underrated the awful grandeur of the work God gave him to do. Though he was but "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," yet to him was intrusted the great work of "preparing the way of the Lord." Thus two

forces were ever playing in the life of this wondrous man, making it beautiful and grand, humble and powerful. The sense of humility and the realization of responsibility poised each other like the wings of a strong eagle, on which his life soared up, up to the side of his God. What a safe attitude for the human soul is here disclosed! What a true relationship to God and man! What sources of greatness—first, to keep self conquered, and secondly, to face a world's opposition with dauntless determination.

There is one other remark of John the Baptist that is full of practical instruction—viz., his "as said the prophet Esaias." This shows his use of the past prophecies—viz., to point him to present duty. He was not so much a commentator on as a doer of the prophets. He felt the purposes of God pulsating through them, and sending his life on deep and strong with the purpose of Jehovah. The words of God echoing through the prophetic lips called him to duty. This is living theology; and it prevails, the very school upon which Jesus afterward set his own immortal seal when He

said, "If any man will do my will, he shall know the doctrine." The mere theorizers by their midnight lamps can never realize and wield the living, conquering power of God, like the brave doers on life's vast, hard battle-fields. Such theories beget the starlight gloom of the middle ages. The dark ages were born through the womb of the monastery, fit mother for that long night of superstition, dread, and oppression, all the legitimate outcome of reducing God to a speculative system, a passive contemplation. These words, from the lips of John the Baptist, gave a full view of the main springs of that power which shook the old dispensation to its foundation, and brought the warm life-beats of the new closer and closer to the hearts of men.

It is appalling to realize the vast work God intrusts to a single man, as He sends him forth to carve his way through life. There is no beaten track for any live soul to tread. It is a new walk with God along a new way. No other being will ever see and feel life as I do, as you do. The same waves of emotion never strike different lives at the same angle. So,

after all, there must be great loneliness among the pilgrims, for experience prevents that fulness of sympathy by which alone they can look within and reach each other. Now God's wisdom, love, and glory are manifested in this, for we see that He thus forms us for His own companionship. The realization of this made John feel nearer to God in life's deep communings and secret springs than to any prophet before him, and it sent warm throbs of joy through his life. Would God we had more of this realization now, that we could feel ourselves standing in the presence of Jehovah, and feeling this could appreciate our nothingness, yet take in the vastness and glory of the work the Lord calls us to do. Then would the soul leap with joy to "prepare His way," and press on with the strength of immortality to "make straight His paths." Then would we go back, and "with loyal hearts and true" enter the fulness of the brotherhood of saints, martyrs, and prophets gone before, sharing their spirit, work, and glory, instead of bending in cold, unsympathetic speculations over their words and lives.

But we may rest assured this vitality of being will excite opposition. There will always be deputations from Jerusalem's dead formalities to question our commissions to exercise the living powers of the living God within us, simply because their plans and formalities are not patronized. But he who realizes that he is just before his Lord, making ready for His coming, will have strength to go on with his great commission—yea, more : will have a power with souls, to which the mere formalist is a stranger. We cannot narrow down life to set forms, for life plays—yea, is—countless manifestations, and rushes the soul on in contact with other life, until at last the great prayer of Jesus shall be fulfilled, and we all shall "be one" in the vast, fathomless, boundless, endless life, glory, joy, and love of God.

CHAPTER XVI.

PROSPERITY'S TRIAL.

"Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."—MATT. 3 : 5, 6.

WE now behold the soul of the Baptist passing through the subtle but terrible and deadly dangers of prosperity. His ministry was pre-eminently successful, not only in producing a widespread commotion among all classes, but in accomplishing that whereunto it was sent. John did not come to found a church, but to point people to the "Lamb of God." He came not as an organizer or builder, but a herald of the King; so, when people heard his call, submitted to his ordinance of preparation, and followed the pointing of his finger until their eyes rested on Jesus, they had reached the point to which John had come to bring them. And we see the people as one man following him this far.

What was it that gave him such power? Where was the fascination, the mighty attraction in the strong, brawny gospel of John? Why should men love to come and have their hearts pierced through and through with the relentless sword of truth which he wielded, and their secret confusions shamed and doubts laid bare in the blaze of his truer life? These are questions every preacher of to-day would do well to study, and are questions every faithful preacher must make a part of his ministry, for they reach deep down into those grand relations between the heart of man and the nature and life of God.

We may say one reason was that God has so constituted the human soul that it cannot rest long content on a lie. Satan may whisper "Peace, peace," but the voice of God within will soon drown the cry with the thunderings of "There is no peace for the wicked." Man cannot look eternity, yea, the possibilities of an eternity, in the face and rest, unless he can see God in that eternity as his friend. There is a dull aching, deep down in life's hidden depths, for

something a lie cannot satisfy. There is a vast sea, with its ceaseless moanings and surgings, far below life's outward seemings. And when some man arises who cares less for the people's patronage than he does for their real good, less for their praise than he does for their salvation; whose great, true heart feels with these deep yearnings of his fellow-men; and whose brave life dares challenge and condemn the damning falsehoods of Satan in the presence and grace of God; men will hear and tremble in the power of his truth and trueness, regardless of its pretence and gorgeousness of a formality, though the high priest be at its head; will turn their backs on the splendors of a Herod's temple, desert the eloquence and learning of a Gamaliel, and press on into the wild inhospitalities of the wilderness, to hear great strong words of sincerity and truth speaking in brave frankness to the depths and wants of their lives. Polished oratory, artistic music, fascinating ceremonies, gorgeous, grand, or magnificent architecture can never! never! never! satisfy and cure the deep cravings of a world of sin-cursed souls.

But, thank God, there is a rest for this troubled world; and when one of those troubled spirits feels the strong, firm embrace of sincerity and truth around it, there comes a calm, the birth-moment of honest trust, even though in the very might of its sincerity that truth has pierced, as with a two-edged sword, the joints and marrow of life. Thanks be to Jehovah, there is enough of the God-image yet left in many men to feel that it is better to die agonizing in honest sincerity than to live in the caresses of known falsehood. In our hearts we do applaud that which is true, whatever demonstration or false outer show self-pride may make to hide our own deepest and truest convictions.

Thus did God bring men to feel Him in John the Baptist, and thus we see his great life towering toward heaven, amid all the convulsions and whirlings of human applause. How grand and unmoved he stands amid it all, too true to waver for one moment from his God's high calling. He stands grander, loftier than the old mountains, whose wild, craggy steeps wake to the echoes of his

God-glorifying voice, for he is founded and upheld by the same mighty hand as they, only his is an everlasting foundation, while theirs shall be shaken and pass away.

Amid all that man can do or say for him, his meat is still locusts and wild honey, his raiment still camels' hair and a leathern girdle, his temple still the wilderness solitude, with the grand, deep-bending arch of heaven ; his cry, still unsoftened by patronage, rings stern and startling, "Repent, repent!" No wonder Jesus should warm in admiration, as he gazed back at this magnificent type of manhood, and exclaim, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? A man clothed in soft raiment? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, more than a prophet."

In times like these in which we live, where popularity is for the most part counted success, and success, alas! is too often followed by the pompous pretences of the scribes and Pharisees, it becomes us to search for every hold of strength and source of power whereby to prevent this puffing up. St. Paul says, "Knowledge *puffeth* up,

charity *buildeth* up." We need heart greatness. Give us that, and we are safe. John the Baptist was great of heart as he was of head, as true as he was wise, as loving as he was strong. He was "a man sent from God," and he never lost sight of his messengership. He felt the trueness of God above him and the sorrows of men beside him, the grandeur, glory, and joy of life within him; these great, living pressures on his heart kept him true, and made him press straight forward and upward, ever the victor in the strife.

We want this strength now, this living beyond the praise and pleasure of flesh and sense, the hearing of duty's call, and seeing truth's standard, despite all the clamor of a world's praise or confusion, of its applauding and homage-doing multitudes, and pressing bravely, truly, lovingly, and strongly on with the full joys of a glad heart. We need to feel we are sent into life by God as really as was John, and that John's Lord and Master is as surely pressing on after us as He was after John; and that our duty is as really assigned us as was John's, and we are just as accountable as

he was to our Lord. The world does not grow old to Christ, nor does His loving interest and sympathy grow cold through the lapse of ages. The kingdom is as dear to Him this day as it was on that when He bared His side to the spear and stretched His hands on the cross. Men's souls are as precious in His sight as when He said to the dying thief, "To day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." And to you and me He as truly speaks as He did to John the Baptist, saying, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness;" for truly we, in all our life powers, are sharers in His work as really as was John in his great heart-loyal service.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE KING.

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?"—MATT. 3 : 13, 14.

"THOUGH Jesus was not yet revealed as the Messiah to His great herald prophet," says Farrar in his "Life of Christ," "there was something in His look, something in the sinless beauty of His ways, something in the solemn majesty of His aspect, which at once awed and captivated the soul of John. To others he was the uncompromising prophet. Kings he could confront with rebuke, Pharisees, he could unmask with indignation; but before this presence all his lofty bearing falls." Says Stier: "He has baptized many, has seen, and in some sense seen through men of all kinds; but no one like this had as yet been before him. They have all bowed down be-

fore him ; but before this man bows down, in the irresistibility of his own most profound contrition, the sinful man in the greatest prophet."

We ask ourselves instinctively, Why were not John and Jesus acquainted? Why should not two lives, the grandest that ever rose on the darkness of a world, be blended together in all that sweet, soul-comforting communion of life's bitters and sweets? But God sees not as man sees, and plans not as man plans. There is something deeper and sweeter far than mere social intercourse. There is a union of soul, a oneness of character, a deep undercurrent of sympathy that springs from nearness to God and His perfection, which outlives and reaches beyond all mere intercourse of this world's associations. Jesus and John were kinsmen, but they were not associated as companions anywhere along life's hard road of lonely trials. Yet Jesus and John knew each other in a deeper, stronger sense than the men of this world ever can. Jesus, who saw Nathanael under the fig-tree, had never for one moment lost sound of that "voice in the wilderness," and through all those soul-wrestlings

in the desert He watched John, while he was stamping and graving the living character of Jesus on his innermost soul, and making him life's reality. This is a far safer, grander, and truer position than to be watching the motions of His flesh and blood. A Judas could do the latter, even kiss the lips of our Lord and be "the traitor" still. Jesus felt the force and necessity of this soul-harmony when He exclaimed, "It is expedient for you that I go away." And St. Paul rested on this deep bosom of peace when he said, "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh."

Here, then, we may humbly bow and adore the richness of God's wisdom and love in keeping Jesus and John separated, that the world might see their perfect unity, and His ever-present power to keep. Here our God shows us the glorious richness of the "communion of saints," how oneness of soul gives oneness of strength and joy, and how all of His are one, whether they can touch hands or not. Heart-touches, and not hand-touches, make up communion in its vastness and joy. The ideal of God was what made the souls of Jesus and

John one ; and it is the basis of all true, enduring love and communion.

We come now to the meeting. That must have been a strange and wondrous scene to the multitude, when the Nazarene peasant stood before the wilderness prophet, to see the whole aspect of that dauntless man change in a moment from the stern condemner of sin and herald of vengeance into the deepest humility of adoring love ; but to no soul present was the scene so wondrous and awing as to that of the Baptist himself. He had been facing a hard, cold-hearted, sin-stupefied people, whose lives were reeking with the blood of violence and black with the infamies of deceit and wrong ; for whom he finds no sermon appropriate but one long, startling, soul-piercing "Repent!" when suddenly there stands before him the Lamb of God, without spot or blemish, "the fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." No wonder, in the light of that spotless purity, beauty, and glory, the sense of his own unworthiness overpowered him, and the true heart bursts forth in the words, "I have need to be baptized of thee."

But now arises the question, How did John know Him? Ah, who can say which of the myriad of ways at His own command Jesus used to touch the soul of His beloved at this moment?—He, who called Nathanael by the allusion to the fig-tree, Peter by the miraculous draught of fishes, Mary by the sound of her name, the Emmaus-going disciples by the breaking of bread, doubting Thomas by the nail-points and spear-thrust. One look was enough to ravish such a soul as that of John the Baptist; for when hearts are ready to love, and stand so close together on the vast plains of eternal truth and life, one touch will send the more than electric thrill through every fibre—yea, will strike the grand chords of that eternal harmony that blends in the raptures of heaven's resounding anthem of "Moses and the Lamb." That will be indeed a day never to be forgotten: "the day of the revelation of the Sons of God," when all the veils and clouds that hide "our Father's" children from one another's love shall be rent asunder and forever rolled away, leaving every raptured child of God heart to heart. Thank God, such a day

is coming ; and we who have here and there in our pilgrimage had the warm sympathy of a heaven-toned soul sweep through our lone heart-depths, waking raptures that we scarce had dared dream before, and swelling along our pathway's loneliness like songs in the night—yes, we may say and feel " It doth not yet appear what we shall be ;" for who can tell the possible raptures of a spirit as it feels all these wakings of recognized and recognizing love ?

But there is another thing that strikes us in this meeting. How different was John's bearing from that of the world ! How totally absent was everything that this world honors and adores, from his ideal of the Bridegroom ! No long, sweeping robe of priest adorned Him. No star of worldly honor decorated His bosom. No purple mantle from kingly court marked him, but the greatness of His soul illumined the life into that holy winsomeness, and John's soul owned its King. Would that the Christian world, after eighteen hundred years of training, would go as directly and firmly clasp the true and beautiful wherever it beats and struggles for God and holiness. As

in the days of John, so now, we need men, brave toward usurping sin, and humble before true greatness. We want men who call a brood of vipers a brood of vipers, sternly rebuke sin in the Herods of modern society, hold steady the curb of right on malice, covetousness, violence, and wrong, and yet ever stand ready to prostrate all their holiest and truest powers at the feet of Jesus. The more humble a man is in his bearing toward God, the truer will he be in his bearing toward men. Trueness to man and faithfulness to God, if they are deep and sincere, go hand in hand.

There is another beautiful feature of this meeting of John and the Master. John, too, it seems, was expecting Jesus to make His appearance, and it may be he oft strained his longing eyes over the multitudes as he uttered such words as, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not, the latchets of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose," expecting to see the promised sign of the heavenly Dove descend upon the King of Glory. But, behold God's way; 'twas not thus. It was not while John strained his eyes in watching, but as his

life's powers bowed to his God-assigned task, that the Prince of Glory came to him. Jesus falls in His place, and comes alongside the toiler as a man. Now, if we would see Jesus we must look for Him straight on in the path of duty, whatever that duty may be. Many and grand have been the visions of His glory that have burst over the path of the faithful worker, while as yet not one single idle dreamer has seen His face in peace. Abraham saw Him by the sacrificial offering, and on Mount Moriah ; Jacob saw Him at the brook of wrestling ; Joseph saw Him in the prison's gloom ; Moses in the exile's path ; Samuel in the temple courts ; David in the days of his banishment, and by the threshing-floor. The Hebrew children saw Him in the fiery furnace ; Daniel amid the corruptions of Babylon's courts, and the lions' locked mouths. And so time would fail us to name the points in life's stern path of duty where God has stood before the faithful and true hearts, as they were doing their part "in that station of life whereunto He had called them." And when Jesus did come to John, it was to receive baptism at His hands,

to show He not only loves to honor us, but the work He has given us to do, and says to us, with a love as tender and sweet as He did to John, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." O Lord, our precious Saviour, what deeds of love and glory are sanctified by obedience—deeds we are unworthy to do, but that Thou bidst us do them, and claim a oneness in the work, saying to us, too, as well as to John, "Thus it becometh *us.*" Boundless, fathomless, inexhaustless mystery of love, by which Thou dost fold us in thy life, and wrap our work in thine!

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOHN'S WITNESS TO JESUS.

"John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me ; for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." —JOHN I : 15–18.

AFTER all, that which decides the trueness and greatness of any man's ministry is its relationship to Jesus. The world (especially in modern times) has had much to say about the lawful and true way of appointing and sending forth ministers of the Gospel ; but the question about which the individual soul of the minister should be more deeply concerned is, viz., What am I and my ministry to Jesus, and what is Jesus to me and my ministry ?

In this passage we see the true greatness of

John the Baptist bursting forth like the glorious sunlight through the clouds of night. We see the spirit, like the storm-beaten ship of a thousand tempests, at last riding grandly into the haven of rest and holy calm. Beautifully and touchingly does John unfold for us his innermost feelings, when he says, "The friend of the Bridegroom which standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly, because of the Bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled." How tender, deep, and complete is the rest of his soul! How perfectly contented in the presence of its King! We turn now to watch the direction of John's ministry as he bends its great life-currents toward Jesus.

Deep down and undergirding all of John's aims were two great purposes—first, to keep men from leaning too much on him; second, to lead them to lean entirely on Jesus. With these two master forces playing in their centrifugal and centripetal powers on his life, he sped through life's grand firmament perfectly poised, and resplendent with the glory of God.

He disclaimed any intention of raising a sect or organizing a church. He called himself a

"voice," not a foundation. He awakened the echoes of the wilderness, but built no temple's granite walls. His heart felt the great pressure of a soul-hungering world clamoring about it, and he longed to lead it to the rest of his God. The strong man felt his heart "bowed 'neath its weight of woe," by others brought. How weak is the mightiest of woman born, to carry heart-burdens alone! A Moses cries, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." A Job longs to be "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest." A David wishes for the wings of a dove, that he may "flee away and be at rest." A Daniel fainted and was sick in the greatness of his heart-care. An Elijah wished to die beneath the juniper-tree. And even our Lord Himself lifts the veil from Gethsemane's awful scene, and shows us His own heart, agonizing in that lone, blood-bathed anguish. No wonder, then, that as a soul reaches higher and higher, and gets a clearer vision of the sure realities of being, that the prayer should ever deepen, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I;" for this must be

the yearning of every true heart on Time's battle-sweeping plains.

John did not try to explain Jesus to his followers, but sent them to gather their own knowledge. He never claimed to know the height nor depth, length nor breadth of his Lord; he only knew that in His light his own powers were as nothing, and his glory was completely merged. Honestly and frankly he says, "This is He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me." He knew that this was the Eternal Son, and that He was the Creator coming to His own. He felt the grand presence of the "Ancient of Days" standing before him, and felt that in His bosom, beat the great heart of the universe, filling every creature with its life. Yea more, there was a deeper well-spring in Him than from which flows and branches the life and vigor of animated nature in material form. That in Him was and from Him swept out the vast ocean of spiritual life, that lofty law of enraptured existence which he could no better name than call it "grace for grace." The warm sympathies of his God's heart were

bringing scenes before him with a reality that prophets and kings had failed to grasp. And this is echoed in his words: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." These are very, very deep utterances—deep even to us, after eighteen hundred years of Christian light have blazed upon them—words whose full fathoms of glory may serve for the soundings of eternal years. But this we may realize as one of the joys before John's exalted soul then: the day of the Schoolmaster was over, and the day of the living, loving sympathy of a home nearer our Father's heart had come. "Grace and truth" were henceforth to be living embodiments, not abstract formalities. The newness of the spirit was to supersede the oldness of the letter. Religion was to burst the crystallized shell of formality, and come forth in all the winsomeness of a joyous life.

No wonder that John's heart, being fired with these realizations, bounded with joy to point his followers to the "Lamb of God," who should feast their souls on the bread of life, and give them to drink of living waters; no

wonder that he should draw the contrast between the two dispensations in the great master-stroke: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

These are truly feastings in heavenly places, raptures of joy far, far beyond time and sense, and far above all the delusions and curses of mere religious formality. It is a glorious chapter: we might call it the title-page of that rich and matchless fellowship with the Father and His Son, the token of oneness vouchsafed to us by the Gospel.

Thus do we see John leading a world to the "fountain for sin and uncleanness;" hiding all near and dear to him in the "Cleft Rock." From this time on, rest flows into the bosom of John, as the deep, holy calm of the nether ocean, which rests despite the tempests that sweep above. His trust and confidence were like the promises of God—sure—for on them they were founded.

But must you and I turn from this exalted vision of life, with no word of guidance, comfort, and strength for ourselves? Does that

Jesus, whose presence breathed a holy calm and heavenly rest through John's life, speak nothing to us as He stands portrayed by the Baptist? Is He not your Saviour and my Saviour too? Have we not received of His fulness, and "grace for grace?" Have we no burdened hearts that crave to be unbowed? No long, hard posts on life's weary battle-field from which we would fain seek rest? We have! We have! And now we stand more fully in the presence of the King, and see His matchless beauty by more vivid flashes of soul-light than did John; so we can testify to the knowledge of His nature and plan of His kingdom. "The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist." The life of Jesus, as it were, but clasped hands with John's life; but it lays broadside, yea, enfolds our own. If we would gain that deep rest John realized in His presence, we must heed His "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We must carry everything that is near and dear to us, and lay it in His arms. *Never own a joy outside of Jesus.* And as the rich mercies of

God crowd life's vast, overpowering responsibilities on us, then He stands by our sides, sweetly saying, "Cast all your care upon me, for I care for you." What words would these have been to John in prison, but he does not hear them. Remember, we are true as we open the way to Jesus, and lead souls to Him. The companionship of loved ones will sweeten and deepen as we merge it into the fellowship of God and His Son, swelling into joy unspeakable and full of glory, while beneath all will sweep that deep current of resting assurance which rolled through St. Paul's heart as he exclaimed, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep which I have committed unto Him against that day."

CHAPTER XIX.

JOHN'S VIEW OF LIFE AND ITS GREATNESS.

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."—JOHN 1 : 29.

THESE words of the Baptist at once mark him as a great man. They show us toward what the yearnings of his heart tend —the destruction of sin. This places him at once above all the philosophers of his age, for they only reasoned of how to endure its evils. John longed to see the evil die. To deliver man from the oppressor within was his great aim. And when he thought of God and His greatness, this was the field fit and meet for the play of omnipotent powers. To him, no freedom was worthy of the name so long as it left men servants of sin. No joy was meet for the soul while it was the prey of sin's disease. No hope was worth the name while darkened with the obscurities of corruption. No government was strong, with the weakness of sin's

desolations preying on its vitals. A true patriot of his race, he arrayed his might against the chief enemy thereof, and reached out for that complete victory which God has given us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Within the soul of the Baptist three master visions must be passing to give birth to the thoughts that echoed in these words.

First, the Lamb of God. How different this idea of Jesus from that of the world and age, yea, even the church around him. They wanted a king, arrayed in all the paraphernalia of worldly pomp and power. But John's far-reaching soul saw more clearly, and realized that man needed a sacrifice, an atonement, as well as a king, and the Messiah's might rose before him in the similitude of a lamb, an offering of the Father's love. He realized that it was not the might and crash of battle or the thunderings of war that could deliver from sin, but the deeper, grander, quiet might of Omnipotent love. The Lamb and not the Lion was to woo and win back the prodigal to the Father's bosom. And so, his lips were the first to utter, as he saw Jesus, the true nature

of his warfare. He saw the victim of the altar in the Son of God, and grasped something of the spirit of the life and conquest of his Lord. He saw and felt the great travailings of God's love as they exceeded the outward glories of this conquest. He was awed and humbled by this overwhelming love. While others were looking for exhibitions of power which would challenge worldly homage in their rough rudeness and crushing effects, John saw the heart of God bowing in the depths of its tenderness to embrace and lift up the fallen.

There was a second point in the character of Jesus which deeply impressed John: that was His coming to take away sin. He came not as earth's great ones, to bathe his career in violence and blood, but he came as a lamb. He came not to seek the name and fame which earth called great, but to take away sin. John had felt the agonies of its torments during those long, stern conflicts in the wilderness, and had seen its soul-ravages traced in bitterness over the multitudes who came to hear his cry of "Repent." And when he saw Jesus come as the anointed one, "to heal the broken-hearted

and preach deliverance to the captives," the sight stirred his inmost soul, and he cried, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." There rose before him the armies of souls rejoicing forever in God's emancipating love, and the beautiful vision of the "glorious liberty of the sons of God" passed over his rejoicing spirit and bound it to Jesus.

How near can our hearts press to the side of John's in this joy! How heavily do the sins of a world press on us! What anguish do we feel for the ravages Satan is committing, and the hopes and lives he is blasting in this wide world! We want a little path cleared of its sharpest thorns, so that our own feet may pass over unpierced; but do we agonize for the woes and wretchedness of the millions lost? John's heart was big and strong to feel and yearn over man's doom and degradation, and, though but man, that great heart bowed beneath the woe, and struggled with its fullest sympathy and might to raise men nearer to their God, and lift them from their fallen wretchedness. Here, then, is a life, grand,

broad, deep, and great, with a holy unselfishness and the loftiest aspirations that can burn in human heart.

There was another emotion throbbing in John's bosom which raised him above his own nation: it speaks in the expression, "taketh away the sin of the world," not simply of the Israelite, but of the Gentile too. Here was a true conception of the nature of God, an emotion akin to that sympathy in the Father's bosom which is pealed forth to us in the words, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here was a charity and sympathy capable of going out with the Spirit of Jesus to a world's salvation. No narrowness of sect or confines of nationality—His brotherhood with humanity was too perfect for that, and His kinship too purely of God. He looked out with a wider, sweeping vision, and felt the vastness of God's love embracing a world, and his soul leaped for joy once more, in obedience to that Spirit which thrilled him in his mother's womb.

Alas! how slowly do the souls of men rise to the stature and glory of John's. Did John speak the truth? Has the life of Jesus fulfilled these words? Do any patients stand to proclaim the trueness of this Great Physician's power? Was the life of Jesus a pretended usurpation, or is it a culminating reality? What is the testimony of eighteen centuries? Ah! all that is worth the name of truth proclaims the life of Jesus a success. The undisputed testimony of infidel and believer alike is that it supplied a deeply-felt need, and gave a vast impulse to all that is good and noble and true in man, and that light, and right, and joy, and happiness, strength, and glory have ever followed in its footsteps. Aching hearts which knew no rest have found rest at the Cross. To darkened souls who had no hope—yea, even to "those who sat in the shadow of death," this heavenly light overspread them. The power of His life is as really beyond dispute as the power of the sun that shines, the lightning that scathes, or gravitation that draws. The balm of Gilead has established His reputation. The fountain for sin and unclean-

ness has graven its living testimonials on earth, sea, and sky. That which makes the pulse of life beat stronger in each succeeding century is the life of Jesus, coursing its ocean tide of life, glory, and peace through the bosom of ages. He is "the light of the world" to the darkened soul, "the fountain for sin and uncleanness" to the impure soul, the "living water" to the thirsty soul, the "shadow of the great rock" to the weary soul, the "bread of heaven" to the hungry soul, the "deliverer" to the soul bound, and Jesus to humanity. "Behold the Lamb of God." Look, look, look! There is no life that stands so clearly before the world as that of Jesus, no heart that beats its warm throbs so near the aching heart of man, no beauty that rises so winsome before the spirit's eye, no voice that calls so tenderly to the lone mourner, no arm that enfolds so strongly and lovingly to His bosom:

> "Yea, all I need, in thee to find,
> O Lamb of God, I come.

Let the sceptic doubt; for, truly, the Christian "knows in whom he has believed," and therefore does "his soul rest in hope."

CHAPTER XX.

JOHN'S LOVE FOR JESUS.

"But the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled."—JOHN 3 : 29.

DEEP down in the spirit of lion-hearted John, 'neath all life's rugged sternness and bold fearlessness—

"Like to white pearls underlying all the moanings of the sea,
Like the hidden gems enriching the deep mines of obscurity"—

lived and glowed one of the tenderest, purest, sweetest volumes of love that ever adorned human bosom. It was his love for Jesus, than which a rarer gem of purest affection seldom flashes amid time's dazzling rays. John battled hard for his exalted devotion. He chose the easier field of the hermit life, and laid aside every weight that he might win a place close to the heart of his Lord. The very serenity of

his devotion made him appear hard and stern to a careless world, but within he was all tenderness and affection. He did not, like his Lord, walk amid the haunts of earthly pleasure. No Cana's wedding rejoiced at his presence, and we hear no sound of gladness from his lips at earthly feast. The social tide of life swept not near his joys, nor the smiles of mere human love play about his pathway. With his hairy mantle and leathern girdle, his locusts and wild honey meat, he wandered amid the craggy wilds of the Judean wilderness, seeking his beloved.

There are vast and sweet fountains of thought bursting forth from John's life of holy wooing—thoughts that light up our ways and should guide our love. First it was a love of character, and not mere physical beauty ; thus it rose at once into the realm of the imperishable. John ever strove to keep before his soul his Lord standing, with every line of His character strictly defined. This is the only foundation of true love. No structure can stand longer than its foundation holds. If we want an immortal love we must entwine it

about an immortal principle. And so Jesus himself had to say to His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away." Yes, expedient that Peter should have the hand removed which lifted his life from a watery grave, that John should miss the pillow of His loving bosom, that Thomas should not have the nail-points and spear-thrusts upon which to gaze; for, until these are taken away, there will be a clinging to flesh and blood, a localizing of His presence and limiting of His power, a continual walking by sight and not by faith—all of which would not, could not give them the heart-rest He came to give. The Spirit of Truth could not come until the heart pressed down on truth for rest, instead of on flesh and blood; nor would they realize His reign as the Comforter until they were wedded to character and not mere bodily presence. He enters and reigns through the power of truth woven into character, and not through bodily form.

This may justly call up reflections as to a practice—alas, too common among professing Christians!—that of marrying a sinner. How a child of God can take as the most sacred com-

panion of life, sharing the inner joys and sorrows, greater still the parentage of children and their training for eternity, to enfold nearest and dearest the heart one who must dwell with everlasting burnings, is to me a most awful and horrible mystery. How can a Christian love regardless of a Christian character? —a spirit like that of Jesus, resorting for its companionship to another spirit, which has nothing in common with the Lord. No mortal man can weigh the sorrow, soul-blight, and eternal woe bred by such a strange alliance.

But we see in John the Baptist one of those rare souls capable of bringing the realities of faith so near that it rests satisfied with the fulness of the Lord's spiritual companionship. How tenderly and affectionately John ever speaks of Jesus! We first hear him speak of Jesus in these words of humble adoration: "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose." Then we see all that profound reverence and respect necessary to the foundation of a grand and resting love—the soul led to and rested against "the rock higher than I,"

from which point it can sweep on in a boundless course of adoration with glad confidence. Without such faith as rests the soul, perfect love is impossible, for love is largely made up of trust. John with all his might pressed up to lay his weariness and weakness on Jesus. He looked out to see the coming of His mighty arm, beneath the shadow of whose wings he could sweetly rest, with the full consciousness of perfect victory and safety.

Again, we have seen this lowly adoration, this boundless respect, as Jesus stood by John's side in Jordan. "I have need to be baptized of thee; and comest thou to me?" but the next moment we see love exalted into modest yet perfect obedience by a single sentence from the lips of Jesus: "Suffer it to be so now;" then he suffered him. A perfect submission of will, a glad obedience and bending into the purpose of his Lord: grand humility, with exalted obedience beneath. In a heart so humbly rich, what raptures must have burned! There must have been an intense, continued joy welling up in the bosom of John—a joy so refined that we need the touch of the most

delicate spiritual perception to appreciate—but when realized it lifts us near the realms where angel spirits feast on His love. This joy is made up of the rest John felt in the majestic power of his Lord blended with the gratitude for the honor Jesus conferred upon him in permitting him thus not only to serve but to be counted a partner in fulfilling all righteousness, a co-worker with his beloved. Here we see John's earthly ministry touch its zenith. The King has come ; the heavenly dove descending amid those glorious words, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased," completes the rapturous vision, and leaves John to feast on the royal food thereof, during the forty days which Jesus fasted in the wilderness. These were days of soul-mellowings to John, meet to produce those grander words than ever came from prophet, priest, or king before him, with which we hear him breaking the silence, and calling a lost world as he exclaims, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." What melody of love rolls its profound measures through this sentence ! It is as if John unrolled his sins

and showed us the meeting of Jesus along the whole line of his innermost being. What unity of spirit is here disclosed ! What blendings of purposes, and aims, and joys of life ! Again the curtain falls, and all that Satan can send swooping down to destroy and mar this beautiful love comes beating on the soul of John. The pursuing tongue of envy tries to shoot its rancorous arrows within his heart. They come and tell John of Jesus' success. When lo ! the heart bursts forth in that most exquisite and rapturous adoration, "The friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly, because of the bridegroom's voice : this my joy therefore is fulfilled." Can there be anything more exaltingly tender, heroic, and chivalrous, in the truest and loftiest capabilities of these words ? The picture is so fine that the touch of human language from earthly association seems to defile it. The emotion is too exalted and pure to travel through the crude channels of earthly thought unmarred.

There is another scene, which to me speaks most eloquently of this love. When John sent

from prison this message to Jesus, "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?" what answer did Jesus send back? Just simply a page from His own life. Such an appeal could be made only when the chords of love were deep-toned within the soul. Well did Jesus know that John's innermost spirit would respond to His own; so He just touched John's life with His own. It was enough. Amid the rich communings of this life-touch the grand soul of John could mount from Herod's bloody prison to the home of his God. Jesus gave the crowd this grand picture of John; but to John He gave His love-token, rich anointing against the day of his offering up, a shroud more fragrant than ever wrapped king's body, meet substitute for Elijah's chariot.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOHN'S COURAGE.

"But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison."—LUKE 3 : 19, 20.

THE "man sent from God" speeds on his errand with giant strides, crashing through the hollow-hearted religious formalities, checking in their bold bad career the military and civil emissaries of a corrupt state, laying the axe at the root of a long-idolized, patriarchal aristocracy, comforting the multitudes of down-trodden, priest-ridden poor, as they wandered like sheep without a shepherd. On, until his hands had administered the sign that was to fulfil all righteousness upon the Son of God Himself, and his eyes had seen the heavenly dove descend, and his ears had heard the voice of Jehovah own the Eternal Son. But still on he strides, in the might of

his God and strength of His purpose, bearing a message from that God to the little, abject, degraded Herod. They meet—when we know not, how we cannot tell—but meet as the ambassador of God should meet the guilty, sinning man, with a bold, true, faithful message on his lips. John reproved Herod for his adultery, "and all the evils he had done."

How different is this from what the policy of this world dictates, or even the Church in an age when worldly policy predominates. Such a church would have cautioned John against what it would unhesitatingly have called "bold rashness, savoring but little of the meek, loving spirit of God." Alas, what does the world or a worldly church know of God's spirit! They are ever crying, "Prophesy unto us smooth things, speak to us soft things." They forget that "Jehovah is a man of war, our God is a consuming fire." They meditate not, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" No; such an idea of God they would not, but their corrupt minds would idolize a God who for love's sake would clothe Himself with corrupt doings, and

fill "our Father's house" with sinners vile. Ah! love is not always silence, nor forbearance, but love is devotion to truth, loyalty to right. So every Bible hero is portrayed as representing, defending, or dying for that truth and right. God's Holy Spirit does not record one approval of compromise with sin, or intimidation before the sinner.

But the worldly church would say this is very bad policy. John the Baptist, if he had lived in this day, might have had a deputation from the vestry or influential members of his congregation, with advice something like this: "Now, do be prudent in your dealings with Herod. We know his morals are not pure, but harsh dealings will not cure him. Proceed softly, gain his confidence, insinuate yourself into his friendship, build up an influence; then, by and by, you can proceed with more hope of success to correct the evil; you can speak with more weight to the King. And then, too, consider the consequences of rashness: you will get yourself thrown into prison, and it may be beheaded, and leave your vast work here all a disorganized and hopeless wreck. No, no; if

you will persist in being bold and severe, do wait until things are in a little better shape." Such, I conceive, would be, to-day, considered good advice from a vast number of congregations of almost all denominations, were a similar issue forced on them. Let us consider, for a moment, such advice.

First, be prudent in your dealings with the Herods. Alas, how many brother ministers have heard intimations like this! "When a sin has become popular," remarks a shrewd observer, "it ceases to be preached against." These words, of course, are not entirely true, but they contain enough truth to sadden us. Be prudent with sin. Yes, as prudent as Nathan was with David, as Daniel was with the decree of Darius, as Elijah was with Ahab, as John the Baptist was with Herod. What is prudence with sinners? Certainly not fawning and flattering their sins. Why, sirs, the preacher bears a message from the "living God," and he must carry himself as becomes his message. John had received his instructions from Jehovah, as has every true Gospel minister since; and what have we to do with

parleying? Yea, rather let us know we are in danger of being "damned if we doubt." Yes, we must be as prudent as the shepherd who finds a wolf in the fold. We are to be "as wise as serpents, as harmless as doves," as fearless as lions. "Fear not those who kill the body," says our Captain; and this is as really a part of the Gospel as "Do this in remembrance of me"; for "the fearful shalt have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," as sure as murderers, whoremongers, and idolaters (Rev. 21 : 8). No; the soldier of the cross must love Jesus more than life, and hate sin more than he fears any consequences of assaulting it. If he has not faith enough to trust the dealings of his God through every conflict, then woe be unto him. Jesus lovingly showed us this stronghold when He said to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." And so, if we are true we must speak the truth; consequences belong to God, faithfulness to us.

"Harsh dealings will not cure." No, but to be true is not to be harsh. It is Ahab, not

Elijah ; Herod, not John, that troubled Israel. Oh, the fallacy of this lie ! Sin must roam rampant through every walk of human life, defiling the social circle, humiliating and blasting the family, sending sons to defaulters', drunkards', adulterers', murderers' graves, daughters to eternal infamy, fathers and mothers to everlasting disgrace, prosperity to disaster and beggarly want, governments to oppression and degradation, the Church to corruption and hypocrisy ; and yet the ambassador of God must deal softly and play gently with this hideous serpent's gathering folds ! Oh, by all the sacredness of your heavenly commission, thou man of God, I warn you to "quit you like men," and be "faithful unto death." God has a character to defend, and His honor is in your keeping. "Whosoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8 : 38). "Gain influence with the sinner." Yes, one has said, "Lot tried this at Sodom, and what did it profit him ? Why, he lost his own charac-

ter, lost his fortune, lost his influence over his own children, for he couldn't get them out of Sodom." No, no; let it suffice, once for all, that Jesus did not obtain His influence in this way, and "he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." "That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." The Christian should disdain any influence that detracts from or shades his sonship, or for an instant brings into suspicion his loyalty to his Father. We live to show ourselves sons of God at all cost. Again, as to its consequences. Ah! there are no failures save those when we fail to be true. Organization, plan, etc., are not for one instant to be arrayed against right and truth. We are too apt to judge a man's work by the shape it assumes. There is a moral force far more successful than any shape. Jesus said, "The words I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Yes, the organism and results for which the true servant of God battles are of God, and he knows, if he is true to that God, the great living temple will be advanced by God's own plan. John could well

afford, as can every minister of Jesus, to die for truth and leave the Holy Spirit to mould the seeming mass of fragments into the beautiful whole. Look at the life of John the Baptist through the vista of eighteen hundred years resplendent with Christian light, and say if it is a fragment, if his work was a failure, if the reproof of Herod was a Christian calamity. Nay, nay; a more solid, grand, complete work it would be difficult to find. We could not take an iota from the course of this great man without dimming or marring his glory. Who now would have had him less bold and outspoken before Herod? Who would have the heroism of such devotion dimmed by one moment of doubt or hesitation on John's part? If I am God's, my work is God's, and He knows how to take care of it. Yea, "I am persuaded He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." The Holy Spirit can use our work as we cannot. Away, then, with all doubts of consequences. Trust in the Lord. Follow the Lord, and press forward.

Who does not glory in the courage of John

the Baptist?—that true, real courage, when self is bravely, gladly offered up for right. No stoical indifference to fear, but heroic love for God, marching on to death with the glad tramp of victory; not rejoicing in a will stronger than Herod's, but in a purpose hid in God. Yes, courage is the word—from "cœur," the heart. John had the greatness of heart to speak and die for God and right—yea, also for humanity. Who can tell what the world owes to-day to this deed of John the Baptist? It swings like the cherubim's swords over the head of profligacy and vice, wherever enthroned, and more than one bold bad man has felt as if John the Baptist had risen from the dead, and were thundering his sins back on his guilty soul. Glorious John! I thank you with my whole heart for this great trueness to God and man. And O, thou God of John, give thy servants grace to love and fear this world as little as did John, and serve thee as grandly, gladly, and bravely.

CHAPTER XXII.

ADVERSITY'S TRIAL.

"Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee."—MATT. 4 : 12.

"MY ways are not your ways, saith the Lord." God has fire for the gold, and gold is for the fire. What we say and do in prosperity may attest our knowledge, but what we suffer and feel in adversity tests our sincerity. The great calls of God are calls to suffer. Jesus says of St. Paul, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." God is too heroic in nature, and heaven's spirit too grand and glorious, to rejoice only in the weak sentimentalism that the world is ever trying to pass off as genuine Christianity. From the days of Abel to this moment there is no honor roll of heroes known to man that can for one instant stand beside those mighty ones recorded in God's

own word ; no deeds so unselfish, lofty, pure, and fearless as the deeds of the armies of the living God ; and, above all, no exhibition of any such intense and glorious love impelling to such self-sacrifice and devotion. No ; God and heaven rejoice in the heroism of the saints. It is a part of their glorious nature, the true fulfilment for that noble craving in the human heart for glory, which Satan, by deceiving and leading on, has swept earth time and again with fire and sword, and bathed desolated homes in their children's blood. Thank God, there is a work worthy of its every power, and a rest meet for its loftiest ambition. It is a part in that work which made Jesus "endure the cross, despise the shame," and a rest with Him as He sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high. I know of nothing more stirring and soul-firing than to enter heart and soul into the study of the heroism of the children of the King, and the joy of heaven and God in that heroism. Jesus said, "Should not Christ have suffered and entered into His glory?" Moses and Elias formed no theme so intensely consuming, that night on the Mount

of Transfiguration, as the theme of "His decease." The Holy Spirit writes, "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." And the King in His glory returns from heaven to write seven times over the blessings waiting "him that overcometh"; further on we hear heaven declaring, "They loved not their lives unto the death." No, no; an effeminate, ease-loving religion is a false, soul-deluding religion, for our God glories in the valor of His saints. "We are made perfect through sufferings," as was the Captain of our salvation; and woe unto those who are at ease in Zion, and whose souls do not go forth to endure hardness with the King, for the conduct of all such is closely allied to denying Him. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." "Be ye faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

John the Baptist had talked well for Jesus, and now God is going to prove him, to set the inviolable seal of sincerity in martyr blood upon his ministry; and so Herod throws him into prison for being true to humanity and

God. Now comes the trial; when the true soul, alive with a burning consciousness of right, is chained under the grinding heel of oppression and wrong. Now, then, John, prove the fibres of your faith. See if your great preaching is able to bear you safely over this gulf of anguish—this long, dark night of trial, to end in blood. With John it was doubtless, as with us all—the bitterest trial is that which comes nearest the heart. It is not the rough, cruel handlings of our enemies that pierce us deepest, but the seeming failure of friends; not the wounds the body shows, but those the heart feels. This was to John something like the trial of offering up Isaac was to Abraham—not only a trial of his faith, but, as it were, of the faithfulness of his God. Jesus was near John, and was unfolding each day His divine power. The country rang with the fame of His wisdom and might. John had heard God's voice own Him as His Son. Now, will Jesus let him suffer on unrescued? or, if He think best to let him suffer, will He not send him many tokens of sympathy and words of comforting love? John hears that Jesus is coming

to Galilee; report after report reaches him; and now they tell him the Master is preaching and doing wonders in the surrounding country. Yet no demand has been made to Herod for his release; nay, no word of sympathy, no token of love has come. The Master works on, as calmly and steadily as if John were down in Judea baptizing and preaching. Can it be He loves him? Can this be the exhibition of the tender love of the Son of God? Herod's cruelty had outraged humanity, and indignant innocence, dauntless and strong, rises up to resent; but Jesus' neglect—ah! where shall armor be found to shield from this? Truly, "thy rebuke hath broken my heart." He can gather no comfort by detracting from the character of Jesus. He cannot say, "I am deceived: he is a careless, heartless man." No, no; for these thoughts would send down with one sad crash all that his soul had known, and trusted, and loved. To doubt the Lord would be to shipwreck himself; yet how can he cling to that Lord against actions so crushing? Who has not been through some such trial? Who has

not felt the cold, dark, bitter waters ebb to the very soul, as the dealings of Jesus with us seemed to annihilate our very ideas of His character? Thank God, He has left us those blessed words to fall back on: "What I do thou knowest not now; thou shalt know hereafter." But John had not these blessed words—oh, what would he have given for them! But no! Alone with that image of God which a life of faithfulness had graven on his heart, these strong convictions, yea, living realizations of the trueness, justness, and love of his King, stood with him. How differently from poor Samson he entered the prison! The locks of his strength lay massive on him, the virgin trust of his heart was unviolated, and our Lord Himself asks the question, "What went ye out into the wilderness, for to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" and then, by all the trueness of God's own word, pronounces the glorious "Nay." Whatever John may be, I hold my Saviour's own testimony, that he was "unshaken by the wind." This man, if ever one had, had founded his house on a rock. What now appears to us one of the most glori-

ous results of John's conduct, as we look at it through the dawning light of eighteen hundred—yes, as John himself must have seen it, through all these years? I should say, the joy that he gave Jesus by bearing patiently. Our Lord Himself has said, "It is more blessed to give than receive"; and surely John was rich in giving wealth. If there was one warm, loving, sympathetic spot to the great lone soul of Jesus as He trod the winepress for us, that spot must have been the heart of John the Baptist. If there was a single life whose purposes were strong enough to beat in unison with the bosom of the Son of God, the life of John the Baptist must have been that life. Oh, we should ever remember Jesus is not in a hurry. The eternal years are His, and His purposes fail not. He will in due time manifest His approving love, and pour His rich gratitude into our spirits for all of our love for Him. "Though He tarry, wait for Him," and make your heart say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him," and the end shall be glorious.

Thus God often tries our faith to perfect it. Strong men need trials of weakness; busy

lives, trials of rest. To such the Lord speaks when he says, "Be still, and know that I am God." We need that collecting of soul, in which, as it were, we gather up our little powers, and stand by the great ocean of God's omnipotence to watch it pulsating with His eternal purposes. Then, and not till then, do we rest on the strength of the Everlasting Arm. It is this glorious vision of God that inspired those grand anthems which burst from the lips of the patriarchs as they went down into "the valley of the shadow of death." To be laid aside in our prime, when there appears so much for us to do for our God and humanity, comes with a cold, bitter chill to the soul, unless, like John, we can say, "I must decrease, He must increase," and so we die as twilight dies into morning. But only let us remember we are not *laid* aside, but *called* aside by the Lord. Blessed be our God. In His great love He often comes to us in our multitudes of care and toil, and says, "Come aside and rest"; and so He calls us away as He did Abraham, Elijah, and John, to lean on His bosom and awake in glory.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MESSAGE OF JOHN TO JESUS, AND THE REPLY.

"And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see."—MATT. 11 : 2–4.

"AS the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." To me, this was the utterance of John the Baptist's innermost soul while he lay bound in the gloomy prison of Herod. In my earlier years I thought this message of John to Jesus disclosed something of doubting sadness, the fruit so natural to such a hard trial as that to which John was being subjected—the trial of inaction, injustice, oppression, and seeming neglect. But now I cannot hold the idea. The whole tone of the Baptist's life, the shape of his message, and especially the shape of our Lord's answer, all lead me to conclude that it

was simply the gratifying of his deep, sympathetic love for Jesus and the work. John's soul was hungry for a word from his Beloved, and he pined for love's communings. He was cut off from much that was sympathetic, and forced to live on heart resources. He might truly say, "He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out," and he wanted one soul-touch from the Spirit of the King; so he called two of his disciples and sent them to Jesus, saying, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" I do not pretend to fathom these words, nor all that beat and burned in the great soul behind them; but some rays of light flash out from them, clear and grand, in which my soul rejoices.

What a spirit of unselfishness! Not one word as to his lone, hard sufferings. No, no! This was not the side of his nature that needed sympathy. Long, long ago, in those stern wilderness battles, had he made conquest of this side of life, and came forth with his hairy mantle and wild food, meet robe and food of the great self-conquest. It is just here many people lose their hold on those they would help,

and wound where they would heal, deepen where they would cure loneliness. When our friends so misunderstand us as to conceive that we are depressed and cast down, owing to the burdens and clouds or some lower elements of our natures, their very mistakes add bitterness to our cup of anguish, as when the disciples so often interpreted the words of Jesus, as if He were dragging through the lower plains of life instead of His great soul-struggles. They said, "It is because we have brought no bread"; when he said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." And when, rejoicing in the glory of His work at the well of Samaria, He exclaimed, "I have meat to eat ye know not of," they, thinking Him engrossed with thoughts of the body, asked, "Hath any man brought Him aught to eat?" Thus, time and again, was His heart pierced by the low conceptions of His nearest and best friends. Those who would comfort us must rise to our outlook in trouble, or at least not form a lowering estimate of our characters, lest, like Job's comforters, they weigh down our overburdened hearts with their creed miscompre-

hensions, and compel us to cry out with Job, "Miserable comforters are ye all." They who would make life's path fragrant with the richness of grateful hearts must learn to know and respect this law.

The message of John showed where his heart was yearning, and for what he longed; and for us to imagine for one instant that this great soul had ceased to care for Zion's work, and descended into the narrow dungeon of mere selfish sorrow, would be to insult and outrage the truest feelings of God's noble prisoner. No, no; the soul of John was cast in a mould too grand for such treachery, and he had made life too true to desert its principles because he was captured by its enemies. Would God the legions of His followers were stronger! He wanted to know of the battle, and the fate of the world's vast millions of prisoners fast bound in misery and iron. He wanted to hear if the time at last had come, "the acceptable year of the Lord," to set at liberty those who were bound. The burdens God called him to bear he could and would bear without a murmur; but he was too true

to his King to be unconcerned as to the great battle going on without, too loyal to the standard to wear the semblance of indifference, as he heard the trumpets sound the onset. No, no; this was the side of his nature he longed to bathe again in the heroic atmosphere of the forefront. This was a part of him Herod, nay, all the legions of hell could not imprison. He wanted to clasp hearts if he could not clasp hands with the hero of his God; and so he sent a message, which to us may seem written in cipher; but He to whom it was sent, and who knows the secrets of all hearts, reads it for us with the clearness of noonday splendor and the voice of the Son of God.

Jesus received the messengers and their message, and that "same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight;" then Jesus, *answering*, said unto them, "Go your way; tell John what things ye have seen and heard." This was the answer of Jesus to the strong, deep yearnings of John's soul. As we said in a previous chapter, He sent a page of His own grand life, the

record of one of the richest hours of action, so far as the eye of flesh and blood could follow that action. He clasped the burning, brimming heart of energy John held out to Him, and enfolded it deep in the intense activity of His own life. This was no fawning nor effeminate compassionating over John's lot, but they met like the great and brave meet who press on side by side to crush the heart of some great enemy's power. It was a full pouring of the purposes and plans of Jesus into the heart of John. There was fulness of sympathy and oneness of soul undergirding all the words and signs of this wonderful scene, filling the whole atmosphere with a lofty, rare fragrance of love and joy, with which a stranger cannot intermeddle, but which comes to the saint like morning breezes fresh from the gardens of the Lord. Jesus Himself was marching steadily on in the same grand path of holy self-sacrifice which He couples so closely with His glory. This is touchingly set forth when, coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, He said, "Elias is come already, and they knew Him not, but have done unto Him what-

soever they listed; likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them." There is something inexpressibly grand, heroic, strong, tender, and radiant in this greeting and parting on life's battle-field between John and Jesus, as they pass on, one to the martyr's block and the other to Calvary's height. Here the souls of the heroic, good, and true may well pause in hushed adoration, for a grander soul-meeting is not recorded on history's page.

The whole field of this scene is rich with food for your and my soul—heaven's own manna in our wilderness pilgrimage. Let us eat that we faint not. If God found it necessary to send John to prison to calm, deepen, and steady his faith; if He must thus say to that great soul, "Be still, and know that I am God," must we not heed such love-provings and faith-deepenings? Active Christians are so apt to defile their faith in God by throwing too much stress on their own work, so God has ofttimes by affliction's hand to lead them to the mount of contemplation, or deep down in the valley of Achor, to show them their weak-

ness and His strength, until the hushed soul nestles in sweet confidence and rest on His own bosom. Joseph was thus calmed in Pharaoh's prison, Moses in Jethro's employ, Samson in the days of his blindness and shorn locks, Elijah in Mount Horeb, Jeremiah through life, Daniel in Belshazzar's reign, John the Baptist in Herod's dungeon, Paul with Nero's bonds on him. Here God shows Christians His power to advance without them, and weans their faith from mere human plans to perfect trust in Jehovah. Yes, go and tell John, and, through John, every spirit-bound child of my love who shall bow in faithfulness beneath the cross, what things ye see and hear. Tell them the word of God is not bound, the arm of the Lord is not shortened, the heart of their Saviour has not grown cold. Tell them the kingdom moves steadily, strongly on. Tell them legions of Herod nor the combined powers of hell cannot bind it. Rest in your God. It is He, and not you, who is to win the victory. You have borne your testimony, and done

your part, now stand still and see what glorious things your God will do, and thus deepen into eternal confidence and boundless rest on the bosom of Omnipotence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GATHERING UP THE FRAGMENTS.

"For Herod feared John, knowing that hew as a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly."—MARK 6 : 20.

THE trials of deepening gloom are those that prove men's souls—yea, disclose to us whether the man rests on himself or reaches down into the strength of God for the foundation of his hope. Few of God's great ones have died in the noontide of their glory; few, Elijah-like, have mounted from their earthly glory in heaven's fiery chariot. God has been more gracious to us in showing of what material His heroes are made, and how their splendors flash out and beam on, in wider, stronger glory as the darkness of adversity and disaster lowers about them. Most of them, like Jacob, can look back and say, as they gaze on the uncompleted plans and frustrated purposes that strew the path of

bygone years, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." But the great command is to be faithful unto death. The child of this world, when he hears the crushes of unmerciful disaster following fast and following faster, may cry, "It is all over: I have nothing more to live for," and sink down in despair. Saul may faint when the vision of Samuel pronounces his doom; Belschazzar may, with crushed spirit, rush into his dark fate; Napoleon may be obliged to have his Waterloo; but, thank God, the Christian soldier has no Waterloo, but "in our God all is yea and all amen." And this glorious light in darkness we are often called on to show forth by trials similar to those of John's imprisonment and the work there sent him.

To me there is nothing more grand in the life of the great Selwyn than these two extracts, which show his soul in the vortex of these very trials. He had seen all the hopes and plans of the best years of his life crushed and scattered by the ruthless hand of what seemed an unjust war. Where once the Church of God seemed planted as a tree by rivers of waters,

and flourishing with the full prospect of glorious and speedy success, he saw devastation, desolation, decay, and sinkings into hopeless night. Yet his great soul endured as seeing Him who was invisible, and laying hold of Him whom the world could not clasp, he pressed on to be faithful rather than be what the world calls successful. He writes (vol. ii. p. 193): "I have now one simple missionary idea before me, of watching over the remnant that is left. Our native work is a remnant in two senses—the remnant of a decaying people and the remnant of a decaying faith. The works of which you hear are not the works of heathen: they are the works of baptized men, whose love has grown cold from causes common to all churches of neophytes, from Laodicea downward." Page 209: "And the pleasant dream, so full of bright hope, has melted away; and the prospect of a few more years, if it be God's will, of plodding labor is all that remains to me to build up again the tabernacle which is fallen down. I do not see my way to another visit to England; it is more congenial to my present feelings to sit among my own ruins—not mop-

ing, but tracing out the outlines of a new foundation—than to go through another course of public life in England." Who that has the heart of a man in him would not do reverence to such heroic faithfulness to God? I love these flashes of light on the souls of God's tried ones, for the world has nothing like it. They show us those massive cables of faith which anchor the hope within the veil.

We come now to look at John in this sublime trial, gathering up the fragments, and striding on with the same great bearing of splendid faith in Herod's prison walls that marked him the leader in Judea's wilds. Most men would have said, "My work is done, my task is ended; I will lie meditating and waiting for my King's coming"; but not so John. He was, like all of God's great Bible heroes, a man of action rather than mere meditation; principle rather than the sentiment; principle must act, doing His will rather than crying, "Lord, Lord." And so God still sent him work.

Again, there are few of us who do not meet, sooner or later, our Herods somewhere in life's

broad battle-field. Yes, as sure as we are active and true we will cross some character who, by some invested power or powers, some position, social or official, can and will be ready to circumscribe order, or usurp our powers for doing good. Satan even keeps on hand a supply of such oppressors, who are ready to patronize or imprison God's faithful ones, as suits his purposes best. Here, then, is a rich, sweet lesson for us. Pray ever for grace to do, then, as John the Baptist did his Herod. Make them feel the presence and majesty of the God in us. Send them away with the conviction written in their hearts as deeply as it was in Herod's: this "is a just man and an holy." Ah! this is the true secret of overcoming evil, of lighting up our dark places, and mounting over our rough ones with rejoicing hearts. "Do good," says Jesus, "to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you." So shall our souls rest in the deep, sweet calm of the peace of God; so shall our joy flow on rich and strong, like a mighty river into the ocean of our God's boundless love. Our prison walls will become the courts of our

king, and the harsh words of our adversaries will bear on their vibrations sweet comfort from our own beloved. So did John pillow his head on the strong rest of his true character. So was he as superior to Herod's meanness and cruelty as he was to his attempted overawings. So were his last days spent in triune faithfulness to men, to himself, and to God. And so the great soul is almost transfigured before us into that higher ministry, where angels serve before their God, in spirits akin to that which laid aside all malice, or revenge, or despondency; did its work with a sincerity, grandeur, faithfulness, and trueness, as if, Gabriel-like, it had been commissioned in the presence of God, and sent on this express errand of holy, strong, and victorious forbearance. He overcame and ascended, the great forerunner of the victor, "ascended King of kings and Lord of lords." Strange, hard, soul-trying work! He here confronts this prisoner of the Lord with this cruel, unprincipled, and wicked persecutor. Herod hears John. Oh, what grace it requires to be faithful to your cruel, victorious oppressor. But the man sent from God

must and will be faithful. John never descended to the folly and weakness of his own will, but ever stood by his great standard, and echoed faithfully his King's word. He did his work for his God, even though there was but a prison to work in and a Herod to work on, for he was a true child of the King and a loyal soldier of the kingdom.

How grand and glorious is the testimony of these trials in adversity, when the world is ready to cry out, "Curse God and die." It is just here we may, like the eagle, renew the vigor of our youth. Here we may overwhelm the world walking only by sight. When the hard, bold Nebuchadnezzars see us yield ourselves willingly to the fiery furnace, they will soon be astonished, for one like the Son of God will make His presence felt. When Daniels prefer the lion's den in faithfulness to the second place in the kingdom in unfaithfulness, then soon will the Dariuses be trembling before our God. Work on, when earth sees no hope. This is the very crown and glory of Calvary. What if Jesus had turned back after his condemnation, and refused to go forward, because

to earthly eyes there appeared no hope, and even the heavens were deepening into darkness, and the Father was mysteriously forsaking the Son? "Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani." This would have been the disaster of the universe. Beyond this world, tiers of watching eyes in heaven's high dome their countless vigils hold, and they gaze down on the bearing of each arena-tried soul, to feel the glorious pulsations of its trueness, and crown it with acclamations of undying love. And if we could but hear the echoes of their spirit-yearnings, what universal peals of "Press forward, press forward!" would greet our ears, as they saw us hesitating upon nearing the line where earthly hope deepens into night. We must ever play before and for the admiration of that higher audience, that innumerable company of angels, the great assembly of the Church of the first-born, the spirits of just men made perfect unto Mount Sion, unto the city of the living God (Heb. 12 : 22–24). And so we endure as seeing Him who is invisible, and being seen by those who are invisible.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE UNSHAKEN REED.

"What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?"—MATT. 11:7.

JESUS did not often give us His opinion of an individual. He speaks of great principles and laws, of the character rather than of the man. But when He does unfold the human heart for us, deep, rich, and lasting is the scene. Of no one does He speak so frankly, freely, and gladly as of John the Baptist. He loves to dwell on the grandeur and richness of this splendid character, which rises by the side of His own life, and passes on in the pathway of blood into the gates of glory before Him. But look what characteristics of John strike Jesus, and behold a heavenly estimate of man and life. John's independence and firmness call forth the grand burst of admiration from our Lord. He was no wind-shaken reed. The life of John had rooted itself deeper than the

soil of earthly pleasure, and the motives of John reach higher than the sway of any earthly admiration. Deep down in the trueness of his God his life was rooted, up high in the purposes of God his motives were swayed. This grasping of the eternal gave him an evenness and steadiness in his grand course as sure and glorious as that which marks the planets' pathways. This was a scene on which the eye of the Son of God could rest with glowing admiration. This was a living union with the living God, through which joy flowed between God and man. Jesus speaks from the richness of His joy, and in it a mighty, grand lesson comes to man—viz. :

It is a good thing to have the soul established. The human heart was made for rest, and not to be tossed forever like the billows of the troubled sea. God is a God of rest. Firm is the throne of Jehovah, and His habitation is the everlasting hills. Thither would He have His children come and sit down with Him. The whole tone of the Bible is one grand call to rest. God wants us to found our house on the rock, and lay up our treasure beyond moth,

rust, and thieves. He loves to see the feet tread firmly the foundations of eternal truth, and the heart lifted up until man walks gladly and surely along the great highway of God's own life, in all the steadfastness of His own unchangeableness ; while "the wicked are like the troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt." And yet this ever-shifting greatness is the one earth seeks. The men who waver like the reeds with every wind of popularity are the men of the hour, but not the men of history: it is so much easier to be swept on upon the bosom of public opinion than it is to anchor the soul firm to eternal right and ride out the tempest, taking all its beatings and lashings until the sky clears, and the great calm of true judgment is ours forever.

We can hardly realize the great unrest of earth—yea, even Christendom, to-day. How vast are the multitudes of reeds shaken by the wind! How few of the rules that govern life and living are as yet grounded and rooted in truth and right! All this farce of fashion in living and dress comes of a thoughtless disregard of what is intrinsically right, what is

really beautiful in the eyes of God, what really makes our lives strong, and glorious, and beautiful. Such ebbings and flowings tell all too plainly of a want of that solemn and earnest dealing with life and its powers which the eternal issues demand, tell loudly that even Christendom as yet is living more for man's approval, than for God's, and so swayed more by the opinions from Vanity Fair than the charts of "the Interpreter's house."

But I love the personality of this scene. I love to see Jesus taking man out of the multitude and dealing with him face to face, heart to heart. It tells me of the possibilities of being true amid these overwhelming surges of falsehood. It tells me of my Lord's sympathy in every effort to stand, even though the whole earth oppose me. I here see, face to face, the friend of Noah, who stood close to him through all the mockings and scoffings of a condemned and doomed world. And it is a deep, sweet rest to realize Him by my side, and to lay hold of the truth and reality of His "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It makes no

difference on what earth may smile or frown: there is yet one eye that sweeps over the man-moved, praise-loving multitudes as they surge, and mark the few firm-standing, truth-grounded souls, and "stands by them." He who loves to see the mountains stand firm amid all the thunderings and howlings of the tempests, and the rocks defy all the beatings of the sea, loves far more to see the heroic souls of His loyal-hearted and true ones breasting and breaking the waves of this world's opposition. And He loves to lead souls, to rest them against the true and brave. He pointed the multitudes back to the comfort they derived from this John of the wilderness, this mountain granite, and called to their minds the rest they found by the steadiness of this mighty man. There are people who imagine there is rest in conservatism, rest half way between two points—"the happy medium," as they call it. Such men do not find rest; half-heartedness can never give it, neither can half fear. Rest comes from oneness with God, an entire conviction of and leaning on truth. John the Baptist was no conservative man, but a "man sent

from God," unshaken by the opinions of men. So simple, plain, and true were the great paths of duty to him that we never hear of his consulting with men : our Lord alone was the dictator of his course.

So we need not complicate life to make it grand and great ; rather simplify it, seize its great realities, and press them with all our might to successful issues. John did not claim to be versed in many schools, but he did claim to know the will of God in living a true life. He did stand fast, rejoicing in truth. A few great truths lived are far better than a great many theories unlived. Not what we can dream, but what we can do forms our characters and limits our conquests in life. "Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven," he shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Let life never be so complicated as to be a tangled dream. Never let plans be so numerous as to be but a series of mistakes. Whatever we undertake for God or man, count the cost, and thus be able to stand.

We are in an age that sadly needs rest : the rest of stability, the home joys of true charac-

ter, sending the pulsations of confidence bounding through every department of life. The intense hurry and change of progress keeps the heart, if not the head, in a whirl. It is this restless whirl that ofttimes so blurs the vision of scientists as to make them think that the God of nature and the God of revelation are antagonistic. What we all need is a deeper, steadier, firmer Christian life, that shall pass in and out — the light and joy of the world. Who has not met and does not know some unshaken reed, standing firm and steady above all life's fickle tossings, unmoved by the smiles and frowns of the popular horde, true to the very core? and who does not realize that this class of men and women form the pillars of all that is worth having in the political, social, and religious world? They anchor all the truth that is held in their vast systems. Jesus sees and knows such men as these must form the basis of all true government, in church, state, or family; it is the governing principle which seems to rise before Him in the question, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" For government underlies all joy, all

rest. Law is the cradle of peace, the centre of strength. The foundation of character and stability must rest on law, not on chance. John the Baptist stands out before Christ, as at rest, and a leader to the rest he enjoyed; and it was sweet to Jesus to feel this strong life working within His own. He loves to trust the trustworthy; He loves to honor and crown the brave-hearted. It is a joy to hear the voice of our leader thus coming through the strife, and encouraging us at our post. It is glory already to feel the strong approval of His spirit coming to our relief. Mark you, these are words John the Baptist did not hear. It seems the messengers had gone ere Jesus spoke them, and not until he passed up into glory may John have known or heard this splendid eulogy from the lips of Jesus. And so we are often left to walk by faith, which is far grander than to live on praise. We must look to our opinion of Jesus, for there is the danger. He will be sure not to wrong us. He will be sure to crown us with our fullest glory; but we are not so sure to crown Him with the fulness which is His due.

Thus He leaves us, as He left John the Baptist, to struggle on into the cleft of the Rock of Ages, and wait to see the heart of Jesus open in all its richness of love for each one of us. Of all the revelations of heaven, I reckon none will be more sweet and astonishing to each heart than the personal love of Jesus. When I come to know how much Jesus loves me individually, it will be heaven in its fulness, life in its vastness, glory in its zenith, joy unspeakable, wherewith my soul shall be eternally satisfied.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DISCARDER OF SOFT RAIMENT.

"But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses."—MATT. 11 : 8.

JESUS now views John in social life, its pleasures and luxuries. He had indicated the stability of his character, the firmness of his principles, and now He points to his triumph over self. The reed which could not be shaken by the wind could neither be made the victim of self-indulgence. The hero who could stand alone firm and true, despite all the storms and blasts of man's opposition, could remain true through all the deceitful smiles of men's fortunes. John saw an independence and nobility of life in the camel's-hair robe and leathern girdle that he knew was incompatible with purple and fine linen. And our Lord would say, as it were, to the multitude, "If you did not find a man in the

wilderness seeking the favor of men, neither did you find one seeking selfish gratification and ease; so you must look deeper for the motives that made his life so strong, and called you out into the wilderness to hear the sound of his voice."

Many a man who has withstood all the onsets of his fellow-men has fallen a sad victim to himself. Nor does this require that he should tread in the footsteps of Alexander the Great, to be slain by the winecup. There is a kind of intemperance which society fondles and lauds, which is as deadly to the higher destinies of the soul as wine is to the body. It is the intemperance of self-abandonment to pleasure, the submerging of life into worldly luxury, such as drown men's souls in floods of ease and sap life of its truest force and glory. John the Baptist stood out grander to the eyes of Jesus and nearer to the heart of Jesus because he never, for one moment, ceased to press forward and strike hard for the salvation of his fellow-men. The very simplicity and unselfishness of his attire were sources of admiration to his Lord. God loves economy in

life, loves to see the powers He gives us all kept at their best ; and here He unhesitatingly and fully sets his approval on that state of mind which reduces worldly care to the minimum in order that spiritual work shall have its maximum. Nowhere in His word does God approve of luxurious living. It is true, " Solomon was arrayed in all his glory," but it is equally true that this state of life sapped his manhood and tarnished his name.

Now, during his life perhaps John heard no word of approval for his dress. That inner consciousness of greater things made him glad that he could, by self-denial, press that much deeper into the joys of true life. He laid hold of what was beyond, and, St. Paul-like, cast aside every weight, to run with patience the race set before him. The freedom from worldly care which he enjoyed was rich compensation for all the self-denials he endured. Perhaps he never thought of the joy God felt in the details of his life. But here God shows us His interest in all the common trials and duties of life. If we could but realize this fully ; if the heart could just feel the presence

of the Lord in all the orderings of life's drudgery, what a world of care would be uplifted from the bowed spirit, what vast wastes of vain strugglings would be prevented! We could press on through the pomps and vanities up into the stanch realities. Well, He is here; for He has said, "I will never leave nor forsake thee." These are no idle words on the lips of the Son of God. Can a mother be unmindful of the details of her little one's life? Are the dresses and food and pains and sorrows of their young lives beneath her notice? Do they not enter into and form a part of her own life? Just so surely do all the details of the life of every child of God enter into His own. Can our Lord express this more powerfully than when He assures us that it is with this very feeling He shall sit on the judgment throne in final judgment, bringing out His identity with His little ones in the startling words, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Verily, I say

unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me." Human thought cannot invent or conceive an expression that will show so close a union—yea, oneness of Jesus with His little ones, as these words of His—a oneness He will maintain to the day of judgment, when all will be ushered into that eternal joy which arises from a full realization of our communion with God. Why, then, should life's drudgery make us afraid, or bow our spirits in sorrow and gloom? May we not cast all on Jesus? We may; we may. Hear Him: "Cast *all* your care on Him, for He careth for you," is His own message left us by His apostle. "Why art thou so cast down, O my soul, and why art thou so troubled within me? Put thy trust in God, for I will yet give Him thanks who is the help of my countenance and my God."

> "Can a mother's tender care
> Cease toward the child she bear?
> Yes, she may forgetful be;
> Still will I remember thee."

Can we afford to sap manhood and womanhood by self-indulgence? Shall the sons and daughters of God enact again the sad tragedy

of Samson and sleep, fondled on the lap of worldly care, while the locks of their might are silently but surely cut away? Who has fathomed the depths of that expression, "using the world, and not abusing it"? Who has mastered the art of gathering from life's treasures the greatest power and fullest nobility of heart? We are sons of God; let us not walk as slaves of flesh. The moment we overestimate a worldly pleasure, that moment we have leaned the soul against a lie, and sooner or later we must awake to the sad consciousness of our misplaced confidence. Surely we have meat to eat the world knows not of; for "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We have clothing to wear the world cannot appreciate—that inner adorning of a meek and quiet life, the righteousness of saints our pure linen, white and clean, which forms the wedding garment at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let us seek these, that when He comes we may not be found naked. Let the world have its "purple and fine linen," let Dives fare sumptuously every day; but let

the children of the King put on their beautiful garments and sit down at the table of their Father, which is the same from which Jesus feasted at the well of Samaria.

Truly, this subject is one of vast and awful importance to the Church of God at this very moment. By whom do Christians gauge their standard of living—the time-honored saints of God or the vainglorious leaders of worldly extravagance? Do the daughters of Israel seek the patterns of their attire and costs of their household from the deep, true, and sacred pages of God's word, or from the folios of worldly magazines and bazaars? Are Christian homes regulated by the standard of Christ in this matter, or by the demands of a vainglorious world? These questions answer themselves. As surely as there is a future for the Church of God, just so surely must the standard of Christian fashions and Christian living in that future conform to the word of God. This wild waste and devastation which we see sweeping in its might through Christendom arises from Christians joining pell-mell in the contest for worldly fashion and worldly

folly. Let Cæsar have Cæsar's, but give God God's. Let the men and women who prefer being counted like the children of this world, go ; but let them not be mentioned as those who shall walk with the Son of God, for they are not worthy.

Lastly, our Lord says, "Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses." Why mention this fact? Why throw in this allusion in the centre of His grand eulogy of His beloved John the Baptist? Was it not to show us the difference between this world's ease and that of the world to come? Earth's idea of rest, and heaven's idea of rest? Yes, truly, earth seeks to soften its clothing, and robe itself in delicacy ; but alas, Naaman-like, "it is a leper." The powers of this world strive to realize happiness here, hence kings' courts are full of luxuries. Earthly comforts gravitate around earthly powers, and this is just the danger : that position in this world is encompassed with worldly lusts and ease which slay their millions. Jesus shows us that His true and brave ones have no powers to waste or time to lose in such lives. They must reach

higher and live deeper, not making provisions for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, but "laying up for themselves treasures in heaven." There is a king in whose courts they shall meet: it is the King of Glory. There are garments waiting for them: the robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb, to shine as stars forever and ever. There is a rest for them: it is "the rest that remaineth for the people of God."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MORE THAN A PROPHET.

"More than a prophet."—MATT. 11 : 9.

JESUS here sets a higher value on John than on a mere prophet. There is something nobler, stronger, grander in His eyes than prophetic vision, and John had that something, which is the living contact with the duties and battles of life. It is grander to stand out in the realities of life than to behold them in vision. Better to be in days of reality than in the shadows of their forecasting. John the Baptist opened the great battle through which the violent, as if by force, took the kingdom of heaven. He spoke as a man in the midst of the very things about which he spoke. He was a man realizing the greatness of the age in which he lived, and laying hold of that greatness. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" was the startling cry from the burning realiza-

tion of his soul. "There standeth one in your midst" were his words about Jesus, their expected Messiah. "The axe is laid at the root of the tree" are the startling words of warning against sin and a fruitless religion. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord," was his idea of himself. These burning realizations in the heart of the Baptist gave his life a brawniness of principle, a mighty force of action, that drew from the lips of our Lord Himself the words, "More than a prophet; none greater of women born."

There are people who spend their heart's yearnings in vain longings to penetrate the mysteries of the future, craving even the prophetic vision, looking ever into to-morrow's darkness. To such we say, in the presence of our Lord's words, "This is not the grandest or truest life you crave. God has thrown your destiny in the midst of a glorious present; the realities of *now* press upon you with loud clamorings and splendid possibilities. Waste not the moments, but grasp these mighty openings for God. Be a John the Baptist, a man of

the *present*, for only then can you be a true man of the future. Only by bringing the present to its true focus are we prepared to behold the outlines of the future with hearts of participating joy. Balaam's vision of Israel's glory was also a vision of his own shame and downfall, for his heart could not follow the march of Jehovah as could his vision. Jonah prayed to die amid that glorious manifestation of God's pardoning love to penitent Nineveh, for his vision of God's will was stronger than his love of that will. The joy of present duty seems to have faded from the man's life; he sought the comfort and delight of living, more by what he knew than what he was, and so had no joy in himself. The present was antagonistic, harsh, and depressing to him. He was only a prophet, and not "more than a prophet." Ah, the glories of *to-day!* "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." All around us are opportunities angels might well envy us, openings such as moved the Son of God from the throne of His glorious majesty to walk amid men, disclosing life and immortality in the glory of

His life—that life He lived within this world's every-day doings.

Again, John was "more than a prophet" by the heroism and zeal of his doing. It is grander, nobler, stronger, greater to do than to tell. John not only spoke the presence of the king, but he lived it. The presence of his Master was stamped on every page of his life. It was woven into his dress, reigned at his table, spoke in his sermons, thundered in his rebukes, and marched triumphantly through all his conflicts. John brought all his faith into line of battle. He hurled the powers of his religion against the evils of sin like an avalanche, and *this* made him "more than a prophet."

Alas, how many lives have "a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof"! How many speak His praises with the tongue, but plan and execute life without counting Him in it! How many parents bring their children, and in baptism's sacred compact solemnly dedicate and give them to God, and go straight away into the great schools of pride, ambition, and avarice, where they train those children for "the world, the flesh, and the

devil," to the damnation of their own and the children's souls! How many come forward in confirmation, by word and form ratify and take upon themselves all the vows of baptism, in the presence of Jehovah and His Church, yet go on seeking selfish aims and gratification, leaving the fields of Zion to languish! How many come to the Holy Communion, and in the presence of the emblems of our Lord's shed blood and pierced body profess and say, "We offer up ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee," when they will neither brave danger nor suffer privation to carry the Gospel of their Lord to millions who are perishing for the want of it, and though Jesus commands every member of His Church to see this Gospel pressed forward to the conquest of the whole world, until it is preached to every creature! Alas! those who talk and do not are legions, and the great stagnation in Christendom and devastation in heathendom, comes from rank disobedience and bold Ananias and Sapphirism. God be merciful to us, and grant us grace to *do* His will as well as to profess it, John the

Baptist-like, to make our religion strong, true, live, real, and victorious.

Again, John the Baptist was "more than a prophet" in that he pressed into all the battles and conflicts of the kingdom instead of contemplating them afar off. John was no dreamer; he was a man of action, a hero in the forefront. His theology was not that of the monastery, but of the battle-field. To know was to do with him. He "was a man sent from God," a whole man, with all the powers of manhood developed to the full, economized to the uttermost, and pressed with all the energy his soul could bring to bear on them far up into the battle. His was the joy of doing. The kingdom of heaven was at hand, and its joys came with it just as really as its duties and trials. His was not one of the souls divided from all the joys of heaven by the cold, dark stream of death. Oh, no! To be true and pure and alive to God's glorious will brought him a joy in the solitudes of the wilderness, a glorious exultation in the gloom of the fatal imprisonment. It is so hard for men to realize that the kingdom of God is *within* them. We

pine for the glory to come, when, if we would but take it, lo, the glory is all around us : that joy which thrilled the soul of Jesus as He exclaimed, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain *in* you, and your joy might be full." Let all the idle dreamings of heaven give place to the real joy of participation in the very will of God, which makes heaven even here. Then shall we catch the sweetness of our oft-uttered prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." With what exalted rapture do the angels speed on in His will. John had this, and it made him "more than a prophet." It made the kingdom to his soul a present, living, joyous reality, instead of a future event, cold and distant. And even now the heavenly manna lies all about us, if we would but pick it up. The sweet dews of heaven lie fresh and beautiful all along life's pathway, if we but had life and realization enough in our hearts to sip them. But we must be found in the forefront if we would enjoy the presence of our God, found a child of the kingdom if we would taste the feast of its fatness. We cannot afford

to sit and muse dreamily about golden gates, crystal seas, and seraphic anthems. No, no; we must do more than this. We must bury life in God's purposes until it is fired by that same heroic love that sends the cherubim and seraphim speeding at His word; that beat in the bosom of St. John the Baptist, and carried all that glorious army of "loyal hearts and true" triumphantly into the fulness of eternal love and rest.

Such are some of the thoughts arising as we behold John the Baptist pressing nearer and deeper into Christ's great love than a mere prophet, and such some of the comforts and consolations bursting forth from these words of Jesus in streams of everlasting gladness from the garden of the Lord. The life He gives us is rich beyond comprehension with joys and glories of living, loving, and doing, to which the mere visions of the Christian future are not to be compared for an instant. There is a joy within our reach—rich clusters from the trees of heaven's own happiness swinging low and ripe over the humblest, hardest path of duty, along which the footfalls of the least of

God's little ones resounds. Surely, here is a broad door opened directly to the heart of Jesus, through which we may look and see what characters may press in to occupy the seats of honor in the great feast of His love.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."—MATT. 11 : 11.

SO says the Son of God of one that stood equal to any of woman born—a man who in the eyes of Jesus, that great Judge who will pass eternal sentence upon every soul of man, and who is truth itself—John the Baptist, unsurpassed by Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, as they stood out in their full glory before the Son of God ; yet has He said that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Words well calculated to make the thoughtful ponder, and, pondering, tremble before the majesty of the dispensation which is upon us, and through whose awful responsibilities and exalted opportunities we must press on to meet God and the judgment. This sentence bursts from the lips of Jesus like a peal of exultation, as His

heart leaps in the joy of the glorious victory, so soon to cast down the powers and principalities of darkness, to rend the veil of obscurity asunder, and let light and immortality burst upon the world, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. He sees the grand end of all these agonizings of body and spirit, and for the moment seems enraptured as if death were already "swallowed up in victory." Thus it is Jesus makes each human soul, as it passes before Him in Messianic mission, flash out splendors for the march of coming ages, and every man, therefore, in some way lightens or darkens the pathway of life for others coming after.

Yes, we truly are greater in the advantages and opportunities of the kingdom of God than was John the Baptist. He struggled long and hard, agonizing in the wilderness and by Jordan's turbid waters until he heard the voice of the Bridegroom, saw the Lamb of God; but never while on earth did John see the full splendors of the Sun of Righteousness. Here and there the healing rays bursting through the darkness lighted up his hard but glorious

battle-front. At intervals the voice of the Bridegroom was borne to his ears, causing his heart to leap with joy unspeakable, of which he himself could only say, "This my joy is fulfilled," or filled full; but the darkness again gathered in deepening folds around him, and lone silence reigned through the unbroken gloom for long weary days and nights of watchings, waitings, and sufferings. John had no New Testament, no Calvary to light those days of gloom. What would he have given for the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, as his companion in the prison of Herod! What raptures would have thrilled his innermost soul if Jesus had simply said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." If John the Baptist had had only these words of Jesus, how completely would they have annihilated Herod's prison and made it the antechamber of heaven! How deep and

sweet would they have made the rest of his weary, lone waitings! How amply would they have paid him for all the moments of the Bridegroom's absence with these words: "I will receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." But John had not these. He had the great outlines of God's everlasting justice, truth, mercy, and love, and to these he anchored his tossed soul, sure and steadfast, without seeing all the beautiful symmetry and playings of life fill up the divine structure, as Jesus, by word, touch, tone, and look, manifested God in the flesh. Surely, "the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" in these glorious privileges. It is for even you and me to look on the heart of Jesus as it lies open before us in the New Testament, and behold "His glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth." Surely we can exultingly exclaim, "In Him is life, and that life is the light of man." We have pressed on out into that vast stream of mercy which Ezekiel saw gushing forth from the house of God (Ezk. 47 : 1–5), past the ankle depths, past the knee and loin depths, and

sweep on now in the full current of that mighty river of His love—"waters to swim in, a river that cannot be passed over." If modern science cowers and quails beneath the unfathomable might and majesty of His material creatures' vastness and glory, much more cannot His spiritual universe of glory be comprehended, save in the clearness of that day that has neither sun nor night, and in the fulness of that development which "as yet doth not appear to us," but which can be told only in the words, "when we see Him we shall be like Him." Then may we begin truly to penetrate this volume of His glorious love, over which the angels are now bending with deep, searching spirits. Then we will begin to comprehend with "all the saints the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3 : 18). Yes, God is surely unfolding Himself, and the light of His glorious nature is falling brighter and brighter on the pyramid of ages, until all shall shine with the eternal splendors of the "perfect day." But do we realize it? Do our hearts see with humble,

adoring gratitude the crowding splendors of His love, bursting on us ever more and more, and filling our lives with possibilities of joy that even such heroes as John the Baptist could not reach, though he climbed and struggled with all the holy, consuming zeal of his soul?

Again, if the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John the Baptist in the fulness of the knowledge of our Lord's life, so is he in the vastness of opportunities for glorifying God. John's sphere was a narrow one. Repent, repent, repent, was almost the reach of his Gospel. The king was coming—yea, had arrived, and the kingdom was at hand; but of its marvellous vastness, tenderness, pliability of love, and exquisiteness of mercy, John's Gospel did not tell. Jesus must bring life and immortality to light. Jesus must take the great, warm, brooding fatherhood of God, and enfold the poor, lone, orphan, sin-banished heart of man in it again. Jesus was to teach us to pray, "Our Father." John taught and saw God as a king. Jesus taught God, and loved God as the Father; and insomuch as the privileges of a child exceed those of a sub-

ject, just so much does the least in the kingdom of heaven exceed John's situation and advantages of the relationship of the soul to God, and the priceless privileges of prayer. Then came the flashes of light down upon the eternal hereafter and the state of those passed over the dark river. Jesus lifts the veil and shows us Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, and bequeaths to us all the rich heritage of social and family joys of the hereafter that His precious word discloses. Jesus tells the shortness of time ere the ransomed soul passes into its joys, and the immediate nearness with which we press up to Him, when He says to the dying thief, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." John only saw the palace of the King through the dimness of the morning twilight. The least one in the kingdom of heaven sees his "Father's house of many mansions" in the ever-clearing splendors of the rising sun. John looked on the narrow confines of Israel as the sphere of his action; we move out to the battle with the mighty watchword, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." Yes, a salvation

as broad as humanity, girding a lost world, as pure as the angels breathing the atmosphere of heaven.

Surely, our hearts may well cry out, "Hold, Lord, thy servants can stand no more." Who is sufficient for these things? And instead of praying, "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom," may we not lift our eyes from the dark valleys of Achor to the glories of the everlasting hills, and say, with a loftier, deeper, sweeter realization than ever before,

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee,"

in the same sense that Moses and Elijah would have sung these words while Jehovah's glory passed by them. For we may well tremble at the unmeasured possibilities and glories of the station God has given us. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation" and realization of life—we who look at the horrors of sin and the glories of love through the light of Mount Calvary, and taste life in the richness of the dispensation of the everlasting gospel?

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW TO DIE.

"And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison."—MATT. 14 : 10.

"BE ye also ready," says Jesus, "for at such time as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." How truly these words describe the departure of God's great reformer. The day dawned as usual, but soon was made boisterous by the festivities of Herod's birthday feast. Perhaps John could hear much of the outer activity, and knew well it meant a day of feasting and joy at the court. Certainly, there were no indications that it was to be, too, the great day of his passage into the realms of glory. Herod goes to his friends, and John stays with his God. The wild, licentious revelry goes on in the palace, the sacred communings in the prison. Suddenly John hears the tramp of soldiers, the clangor of armor; the door opens, the executioner stands

before him and tells his errand. Silently the deep hush falls, and God in sacred love veils a scene we may not know until we stand with the great forerunner on the hills of Zion. One thing we do know : quick and perhaps painless was the passage of this mighty soul into glory.

Let us contrast this death with the ascension of his great prototype, " Elijah the Tishbite." Both men had met the armies of wickedness with brows of brass and nerves of steel ; both swept on in that grand, lone, stern singleness of purpose, bowing the minds of a nation in their might ; both men especially favored of God with inner strength and great, deep joy in His purposes. Yet how different the death-bed scenes. Around Elijah the very heavens lowered, and their fiery chariot bore him up to the realms of glory. Neither did the moment of his ascension come unexpectedly to him, nor his dearest and truest friend, Elisha. God touched both of their minds, and made them realize the coming glory.

Thus God's dealings often appear to us contradictory. But no ; the glory of His name

and His servants stands ever before Him, and every motion of His hand, impulse of His will, decree of His kingdom, moves toward these. Elijah passed up as every man would like to do; John passed up as only great, heroic soldiers of God dare to do.

John's latter end was a stronger testimony of his trueness and greatness than Elijah's. God suffered the waves to beat with relentless cruelty and pitiless force on the bosom of John. He never was permitted to see his enemies humbled, nor their vindictiveness crushed. Elijah went forward with the army of Jehovah, laying all low until the nations trembled at his word, and the king cowed before his holy majesty. Yet John was not his inferior, neither in the power he wielded over men's destinies, nor the love of his God; and that God permitted him to march on in the greatness of his might through the bloody jaws of death, up into glory; and in so doing he heads the columns of a long and glorious army of heroic sons of God. If his death was harder to flesh and blood, it was a more glorious victory over flesh and blood. If the star

of his faith was plunged in the gloom of a darker night, it shines all the brighter to those who must pass the gloomy portals of trials and the horrors of that night. Yes, we feel the help and brotherhood of John's death, while the splendors of Elijah's translation may dazzle but do not lift us.

Again, we see the goodness and glory of God in the very seeming harshness and heaviness of John's trials and death. Here was a man God could and did put in the forefront of the hottest battle, and call on earth and heaven to behold, admire, and rejoice over the massiveness of his heroism. If we would but make them open by the grace of God and prayerful faithfulness, we would find that the so-called calamities of life sent to try us are as rich with blessings as are successfully accomplished plans. That was a grand triumph when Satan returned from the arena where he had been pressing Job with infernal fury and malignity. Yes, he returned baffled, defeated, crestfallen, compelled to do homage to the heroic love of God's great champion, while heaven shouted the glorious victory, and God Himself,

descending, talked with the victor, worn, tried, tired, and forlorn, but true, true, true, still. Such are the characters needed, not only to glorify God in our days and times, but to lead forward men, to bring out the courage and devotion of the pilgrim bands. There has been a great dearth of martyr blood, and the fields of Zion languish. The hardihood of the Cross soldier dies into a sickly sentimentalism. The alms of the churches are largely expended on their own fancies and love of show. Great breaches are made in the outer walls which protect state, family, and altar, and the surging tides of devastation sweep in upon us. There must be a firmer stand. There must be the spirit revived that can walk undaunted through a field of blood. Earth's followers are risking and spending more for their cause than the people who are named after Christ. Come, let us press closer by the side of this man of God with our own lives, and count it a glory to die as he died, so brave, so true. Let us call back the multitudes who would search far and wide for Elijah's chariot, and form them close and strong around the mar-

tyr block of John the Baptist. We know that God has chariots of fire and horses of fire ever at command, and He can at any moment array them on the mountains; but would that fire the hearts of His army? Nay; to rouse us the mere cry of "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" will not do; we must see Davids going forth with their lives in their hands, see Johns again laying their necks on the martyr's block.

The deed was done. John the Baptist had won the martyr crown, and lit a fire whose livid flames shall ever flash from heart to heart as long as there is one spark of Christianity in the bosom of man. He needed no long death-bed scene to bequeath this legacy. He died as he had lived, with that bold, startling decision and promptness. His followers came in, took up the headless trunk, buried it, and went and told Jesus. Ah, well did Jesus know it ere they came! Had not His soul joined the shout of triumph which resounded through heaven as this brave spirit passed its portals? And yet His answer to the heart-stricken mourners was, "Come ye apart and rest

awhile." He Himself "departed unto a desert place." Here, then, we get the key to unlock the richness of this inheritance left the Christian Church by John the Baptist. With Jesus, let us retire into deep meditation, until our souls grasp the great principles of his life, and we feel the mighty sinews of his struggles nerving our weak hearts; contemplate the secret springs of his power until we can feel the same uprisings of soul within us, and move forward, counting life precious only as it shows our love for the glory of God over and above everything else. Yes, "Come ye apart and rest awhile," that your souls may settle down and rest on the goodness and mercy of God, lest these mighty shocks make shipwreck of faith. After every trial of life we need to go and tell Jesus and then rest awhile, as we bathe the soul anew in the sympathy and spirit of God. Carry every wound received in the battle to the Great Physician, and let Him pour in the balm of Gilead. Blessed attitude! to sit quietly by the side of the tombs of loved ones in sweet companionship with Jesus. These death-gaps are calls away from the terrible

whirl of this world to hours of soothing meditation with Him who is Lord of both quick and dead ; for He loves to meet us at the tombs of loved ones and share the sorrows of our hearts. Precious, loving Saviour ! What would this world of aching, breaking hearts do without thee ? And yet there are men and devils who would take thee from us. But whom will they give us instead, to whom we may go and tell our heart-troubles, to give the rest thou givest ?

CHAPTER XXX.

JESUS IN JOHN'S FOOTSTEPS.

"But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them." —MATT. 17 : 12.

WE here see and feel one of the impressions made on the heart of Jesus by the life and death of John the Baptist. And this impression of our Lord throws a flood of light over life's aims, trials, and ends.

We may have been astonished and confounded at the apparent neglect of John by our Lord; but here we look into the great heart of Jesus, and catch a dim outline of the character and motives that led to such treatment of the "saints of all ages," for John was no exception. God nowhere manifests Himself as a sentimental fondler of human weakness, but a great admirer and reverencer of holy heroism. The fact that Jesus was in Galilee at

the time of John's darkest and hardest trials argues not that he was under any greater obligation, therefore, to go to his rescue or comfort any more than to come to ours or any other saint's; for distance is no barrier to the movements of the Lord: it is just as easy for Him to flash from the throne of glory into the presence of any being in the universe as it was to walk in the palace or prison of Herod for John's sake. If John had a right to complain of neglect by his Lord, because He came not, so has every prisoner of Jesus of every age and clime. But, thank God, the Christian life is lifted on a higher plane, and moulded in a grander form. The heroes of our God stand out like mighty men, and bear themselves like men of renown, and not a set of mere fondlings, with no character in them. Tender, fond, affectionate, and loving, they are and must be; but undergirding all of these beat the surges of a great, brave life sweeping on to glorious victory. Jesus knew this from all eternity, and He made John feel and realize it too. Yea, and every saint will catch the same glorious key-note of eternal life as the pulsa-

tions of God's spirit beat within him. Our Lord, instead of taking John out of his danger and death, said He would follow on, and cause His own great soul to traverse the deep valley, His own precious feet "to tread the winepress alone," with a greatness of anguish no mortal ever before felt. His own sacred lips, which had feasted from eternity on the honey and the honeycomb of God's love profound, would He compel to drain to the dregs that mysterious cup of anguish, even though it should drive the sweat-drops of agony in traces of blood from His face. Yes, man eats bread by the sweat of his brow, but Jesus gave the world the bread of life by the sweat of agony and blood. Did it not cause Jesus struggles within? Yes, such as we may dwell on for all eternity, with ever deepening and adoring love, but never, never, never fathom. Yet even now we hear Him echoing His soul's anguish in such words as, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, deliver me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name" (John 12 : 27). Here we catch an echo

from the great inner chambers of life ; a note of its eternal trueness is sounded, a light is flashed down on the mysteries of living, and a fountain is open from which comes a deep gush of heaven's joy. Here we see that the aims of life are by no means worldly ease or temporal exemption from the anguish of the conflict, but that we come into the world just for the purpose of drinking deep cups of sorrow and meeting hard hours of trial. To shun these is to shun life's greatness and heaven's glory. And so we see Jesus pressing on up by the side of John in the battle, rather than recalling him from its fury.

This must continue so long as the kingdom of our God is assaulted and devastated by sin, so long as wrong runs riot, and violence covers the earth. Who would wish to come back from the battle-front and leave the colors of the Master to be dragged down and dishonored by His enemies ? Yet a want of realizing this spirit of Christianity has sadly lowered the standard and brought great weakness in the armies of the living God. Babes are whining where strong men should be shouting pæans of

victory. When will the minister of the blessed Gospel learn to train up men to endure hardness as "good soldiers of Christ Jesus"? When will we nerve and strengthen the arms of Israel by pressing up with all our might to share the trials and dangers of the forefront heroes, instead of sounding sad recalls? When we forget the power of looking back, and "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," then will we once more hear the shout of mighty ones in our midst, and the standard of the Lord shall go forward.

"They did to him what they listed," said Jesus. Strange liberty granted the children of this world; terrible legacy of wrath laid up against the day of wrath. It is hard for the Christian to endure the treatment of wrong from the hands of a wicked world. He feels, "O, if only it were the Lord, how meekly would I bow, how humbly would I bare my bosom to His stroke. But it is these unfeeling sinners, these lovers of violence and wrong led on by vindictiveness, malice, and all fiendish spleen—how can we endure this?" Ah! were

Herod and Herodias saints? Yet they and the party they represented did what they listed with God's mighty hero. And our Lord Himself says, "Likewise shall the Son of Man suffer of them." "Consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be tempted;" for God holds the sinners' chain, and it is just as true of our enemies as it was with Pilate, to whom Jesus said, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." We must look beneath all the moanings and tossings of this world's sea, and we will find our Father still holds it in "the hollow of His hand." The wicked have done wickedly, and have wrung the lips of God's saints with anguish, from the days of Abel until now; nevertheless, we can truly say, "I will put my trust in God, for He is the help of my countenance, and my God."

Again, there is great joy and love for the saints in all this ordering of the Lord. We are told that the Master Himself, "for the glory before Him set, endured the cross, despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God." Wherever we turn, through the

walks of God's word, we meet the same strong current of revelation coupling the heroism of the Christian with the joy and glory that is to be his forever. Jesus said to the sons of Zebedee, when they asked to be seated on His right hand and on His left, in His glory, "Are ye able to drink of the cup I shall drink, and be baptized with the baptism I shall be baptized with?" Here He couples the conflict and the glory. Again, "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." Again, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." And when the words of the glorified Son of God peal forth in messages to the seven churches, seven times over does He utter, "to him that overcometh." And no star of glory, no song of rejoicing, no palm of victory, no name in the temple of our God is vouchsafed to any but the conquering heroes. Said the apocalyptic angel of that vast multitude no man could number, as they stood in their white robes and waved their victor palms, "These are they which came up through great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

But there is another depth of comfort and glory in these words of our Lord. They tell of a union of hearts and lives way down deep in the characters of men and women. Jesus let John suffer, not only because it is Godlike to suffer for right, but because by such sufferings great souls are knit in eternal bonds of holy love. The martyrs were altogether under the altar which St. John saw in the heavenly vision. Nor will time nor eternity separate those who have met and learned to love in the great forefront of the battle. It pleased God in bringing many sons to glory, "to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." Yes, the sufferings of Christ woo us as nothing else could do. "If I be lifted up," Jesus cries, "I will draw all men unto me." These great yearnings of the soul for deeds of greatness have a higher aim and more glorious end than to devastate and make desolate God's beautiful earth, and strew it with millions slain. Guided by the spirit of God, they lay hold of the heroism of the Son of

God, who exalts courage to its loftiest and truest aim and end.

It is a grand sight to see Jesus marching thus past the block red with John's martyr-blood, beholding it with a love deep, tender, rich, and heroic beyond human comprehension, and thus steadily turn His own warm bosom toward Calvary. Look at Jesus in this light, and then weigh His words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Yes, follow Him as He followed John, and all that noble army of martyrs before him. Such are the followers Jesus loves to overtake Him, and when they do reach their Lord, surely there is a richness, depth, sweetness, life, and rest in the union that weak souls cannot know, but is surely for them who have suffered with Him, and who "shall reign with Him forever and ever. Amen."

CHAPTER XXXI.

TRUENESS INVINCIBLE.

"At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him."—MATT. 14 : 1, 2.

THE bloody head of the man of God was not easily wiped from the memory of Herod. The horrible deed had kindled something of the flame which could not be quenched, and restless horrors startled him with the creepings of "the worm that never dies." The day of grace had been despised, and had faded into the night of feverish, startling dreams, the shadows of despair. Let us look closely at this man's soul, and see the traces of God's avenging finger. Let us, if possible, allow the terrible warning of Herod's doom speak out to those who dare despise God's day of mercy.

The gay assembly of the birthday festivities was soon gone. The stimulating excitement

of false pride, cooling, died into sickly, loathing disgust. Self-respect stood mutilated before the bar of conscience. The silence of life called the soul into her hushed chambers, and turned it loose upon itself, and the poor cowardly heart is left to the irrevocable consequences of its miserable selfishness and weakness. Never again could Herod go in his hours of weakness and soul-tempest to hear the deep, true, strong soul of John calling him into a safe and higher life. The cistern of pure waters was broken, so he could no more refresh his polluted soul therefrom. John was beheaded, but Herod died. He had sinned against his better self and his God. Everything that could create and intensify remorse was in his life, and it haunted him as spectres from the tombs. John the Baptist still lived before his tormented soul, no longer as a victim of his power and malice, but as one whose very life of holiness existed to haunt him. All that by God's grace might have been turned into real rest, joy, peace, love, and glory, had by sin been made to his soul visions of condemning wrath, gathering about him from their

tombs. One word of command could cast John's body from his prison-house a lifeless trunk, but all the combined powers of his being could not cast his memory from the terrified soul.

Here, then, is one of the legacies good and true lives leave the world. They are as truly "a savor of death unto death" to the unrelenting wicked, as they are of life unto life to the fearers and lovers of God. And yet what a temptation Satan ever makes for people, and especially young people, to neglect and even deride and persecute the good about them. How often do we hear it said, and how much oftener is it felt, "that the fear of being laughed at and being persecuted by the world keeps me back from Christ." And who is this tormenting world? They are men and women who break over the blessings and mercies God throws around them, with a hollow pretence of courage and greatness, to cast disdain upon Him. Let me here speak a word of warning from the depths of my heart, praying God's spirit to plant it as a living seed in yours. The days will come when those mes-

sengers of good, so lovingly sent from God, will be called away. Their Father loves them too much to keep them exposed to the indignities and persecutions of a bold bad world; and, once gone, your heart-hopes will wander about, seeking, as it were, comfort and sympathy from the tombs. Your future rest becomes a half-hoped, half-dreaded vision of ghastly apparitions. Your treacherous heart will wake up all too late to the vastness of the never-to-be-restored loss. They are gone, gone, gone, and left a great loneliness in life, a great darkness in hope, a great restlessness in peace, a great void in the heart that earth can never fill, but which stands trembling, dreading, yet yearning toward the graveyard, where your rashness has driven, all too soon, the sweetest, loveliest, and truest friends of your heart. Few are the souls who cannot look back and see some terrible blight caused by sinful intent or neglect. What would you give to-day to have the holy influence of that pious, praying mother, long since laid away to rest, whose soul-yearnings in days gone by you almost despised and trampled under foot,

whose prayers you thought beneath the dignity of your young spirit, whose advice you haughtily scorned? Well, she has gone to "the echoless shore," and, call as you will, you cannot bring her back. You may see some great and mighty doings of God's spirit, and hear of the wonders of His grace, as the battle deepens and the conquest goes forward, and it will make you realize that your mother's holy influence lives again; but she comes not back to your yearning heart and empty life.

We need not pass beyond the tomb to realize Herod's emotions. There are death-scenes in every life as sad as the hushed grave. We have murdered associations that spoke peace, comfort, strength, and love to our hearts—murdered them in some false pride, some harsh moment of vindictiveness, some evil hour of darkness, which passed and left us but a corpse of joys that lived nearest and deepest within our hearts. What can all the fascinations of the world's giddy, pleasing device, which made us do the rash deed, pay us for these? What can all its gaudy, empty, mocking hollow-heartedness give us for lost jewels of heavenly

purity and holy value? No, they are gone, and the powers they once wielded in us seem but the doings of departed spirits as we hear of them from without. We may hear of others' pleasures, and see others' joys, and we may feel John the Baptist has risen from the dead; but we also feel that he will not come back to us, however much we may desire to see him. And if we, like Herod, abuse God's mercies by His servants, we, like Herod, will stand one day before the King of pity and throne of mercy, all unanswered. Jesus will become as silent to the Herods of the nineteenth century as He was to Herod the tetrarch.

But there is another thought here for the child of God. However much he may be despised and persecuted, yet his trueness to God must carve its testimony on the stony hearts of this world; his light must leave its traces amid the gathered gloom; his purity must breathe its fragrance amid the sickening fumes of death. God will be glorified. Even though the darkness may not comprehend the light that shines in it, yet will the eyes of heaven rejoice in its glory. We live for others than

the wicked of this world and age. We are passing on amid scenes and hosts and glories whose vastness appals the comprehension. Our bearing amid the scenes and struggles of the conflict thrill other spirits than those of the enemy. Ah! the seen is such a small part of life compared to the unseen; earth's issues are so insignificant compared to the great bringings forth of eternity! We shall as really enter into the joys of judgment and justice as we shall those of mercy and love. We must have our Herods—foxes who would sacrifice all we hold sacred and dear for mere worldly fame or pleasure—strong powers who appear to circumscribe and imprison our usefulness, and keep us back from the work of God. Let us remember that one of God's grandest works is to make grace stand out superior to these, and rise above their narrow, brief prison walls into the unmeasured vastness of the glory about us—the overwhelming joy of the sons of God—for we are truly "come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly

and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel." Here, then, is our stand. To the wicked we may leave dim forebodings and dreadings; but for us, the so glorious realities stand out in all the fulness and clearness of the love of God.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

"He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light."—JOHN 5 : 35.

THE hush has fallen again along Jordan's banks and Judea's mountains. The great preacher has gone home. His words have smote a vast multitude of human hearts, for weal or woe, for joy or sorrow, for life or death. Jesus turns and reviews the field with deep emotion and words of warning. He exclaims of John the Baptist, "He was a burning and a shining light." Yes, John's was the real fire. No false, borrowed glimmering, no glacial reflection in icy coldness. The man's life was a fire. His soul burned in the flames of living zeal. He was consuming life's forces in the intensity of his service. Men felt that some living force dwelt in him. The multitudes were conscious of a warmth and glow

about him that they failed to find in any of the formalities of priest or Pharisee. They laid their hand on his bosom, and felt it warm with the fires of real life. No hollow emptiness there. Every word spoken was to John a burning reality. His theology came as live coals from the altar of his God, each one firing his own soul and intensifying his own life, making it a shining light. If ever man had done his part by man as well as God, John had. His great heroic soul lifted up the mighty truths of God-blazing beacons from the furnace of his own life within. He shone with a glory amid the doubts, gloom, and darkness of a degenerate world, that soul-light gleaming along the shrouded paths of ten thousand lives. The poor and forsaken, the publicans and harlots saw a tenderness of mercy arising out of the gloom, and felt a glow of sympathy the Church had never given before, thawing and waking their hearts into life and responsiveness. The surrounding world felt "he was a man sent from God," and this feeling sent a thrill of quicker, gladder life through their hearts.

Ah, the glory that God has placed within

the reach of a human life! He makes it possible for man to rise and shine, a thing of glorious beauty to His eyes. Jesus was deeply touched and greatly rejoiced at the life of John. It came up out of the darkness and gloom of a world's selfishness and sin, and stood before Him warm with the glow of heaven's own fires, grand with the principles of God Himself. Cæsars and kings were nothing in comparison to its depths of joy, strength, right, and glory of immortality. Jesus rejoiced in the warmth and light of John's life, and then shows us where the secret of His joy lies. He wants our souls burning with holy zeal, and wants that zeal to give earth a brighter glow—wants us to be stars for the Sun of Righteousness to light up, constellations in the firmament of His love, held in our orbits by the gravitation of His love, showing forth His glory by the gladness and trueness of our lives.

But there was another picture before the mind of Jesus as He spoke, and He told it in the words, "Ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light." Yes, they had stood by the

side of God's great preacher, had heard the words as they fell burning from his heart of fire, had seen the old dispensation lighted by the great splendors of his true life like an old castle by the beams of the morning star; and they rejoiced, but their joy was but for a season. It was the terrible joy of sensation-lovers instead of truth-hunters and right-doers. Their inner lives offered no fuel for the burning flames of John's zeal to ignite. They simply warmed themselves by the fire of another, only walked by the glory of the shooting-star as it blazed across their pathway, but gathered none of its brightness. Theirs was the reflected joy of another; they had no joy within themselves, and so their lamps went out while the bridegroom tarried, and they slept. When the cry arose, "The bridegroom cometh: go ye forth to meet him!" lo, they awoke in darkness, and cried out in helpless perplexity. The day for shining in borrowed glory had forever passed. The rejoicing children of the bride-chamber passed in, leaving them in outer darkness and wretchedness. The joy of a season died in the night of eternal

gloom. This was the tone of sadness that pervaded our Lord's words to the multitudes about Him, and especially the scribes and Pharisees, who could not be changed into better men, despite the burning life and glowing light.

We, too, have been touching that burning heart and rejoicing in the splendid life of John the Baptist. We have felt the mighty tides of his soul lift us and press us on out deeper into the vast ocean of God's purposes. Shall it be the joy of a season? The seed on the rock with no depth of earth beneath it? The rustlings of the leafy fig-tree? The Hosannas of the fickle multitude? Shall John the Baptist simply be our admiration; or shall John's purposes be ours, and fire our lives? Shall John's principles gird our hearts with strength? Shall John's God be our God? If there are to be any solid results, we must arise from the contemplation of this mighty man's life with a desire and determination to act. We must cast aside self and lay firm hold of the living God. It is a terrible thing for God's lights of mercy to go out, leaving souls just where they

found them. It is an awful thought to be mere children of sensation. They may have preachers whose zeal and fire may burn and glow as did John the Baptist's ; but what the preacher is can never save the hearer irrespective of what he is himself. We will not stand or fall by the mere impulses we have felt *on* our souls, but by the life of God *in* our souls. "Christ in you the hope of glory," and the only hope.

Can we, like John, look out on the work, in at self, and up at Jesus, with the grand words of glory, "I must decrease, He must increase"? These words are no sad requiem over fading worldly honors, but a welcoming of the incoming tide of glory ; not words of mere hopelessness, but the exultings of a soul sinking into the boundless sea of glory and love. It is that lofty attitude which causes the Spirit to write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." Yes, passing into Him with the full, sweet hidings of eternal rest. A few more strokes of time's oars and we stand on the eternal shore, confronting the long line of "spirits of just men made perfect," whose lives the sacred

pages of God's word have flashed down upon us. Will we stand there with hearts burning with the intensity of their lives ; and, above all, will we have been able to drink of our Lord's cup and be baptized with His baptism as far as men can be? Will we so have suffered with Him as to be counted worthy to reign with Him? Thus to deepen our glory into the glory of our Lord, whose joy shall be in us, and our joy shall be full—one with all the saints in glory, one with Christ the living head forever. Amen.

THE END.

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